PRAISE FOR ROGER HALLAM'S PREVIOUS BOOK, *COMMON SENSE FOR THE 21st CENTURY*

Brilliant: wise, profound and persuasive. If you want to understand Extinction Rebellion, or how to change the world, read it.

— George Monbiot, columnist at The Guardian, author and activist

This is not just an argument, it is an instruction manual for ripping through the corruption and complacency that will destroy our planet.

— Paul Mason, author of *Clear, Bright Future: A Radical Defence of the Human Being*

[Roger] provides a blueprint for people who are sick and tired of the futility of civil discourse in combating the climate catastrophe. We hope this film inspires people to embrace radical tactics and actions that bring about real change. Our very existence depends on it.

— Rooney Mara & Joaquin Phoenix, actors and activists

Is Common Sense for the 21st Century the best hope we've got to prevent human extinction? Yes, I think it is.

— Dr Alexandra Jellicoe, environmental engineer and scientist

[Roger] has a lot of integrity and charisma.

— The New Yorker

Hallam... is widely seen as the driving force behind [Extinction Rebellion's] tactics, [and] recommends that activists emulate past movements like the United States civil rights movement and the Yellow Vests in France.

— The New York Times

Hallam's activism led to King's College London agreeing to divest millions from fossil fuel companies and commit to carbon neutrality by 2025, following his hunger strike and protests.

— Jeremy Harding, London Review of Books

PRAISE FOR EXTINCTION REBELLION

Extinction Rebellion is the most important and promising movement of our time.

— Greta Thunberg

The activists of Extinction Rebellion are not asking for too much at all. They are asking for what is right.

— Michael Stipe, R.E.M.

I'm happy to lend my voice to these young people who have inspired a completely new movement.

— Emma Thompson

You need to get [governments] to recognise that this is the most serious crisis that humanity has ever faced... Disruption can ruin the world. But there's another form of disruption, which is to stop the world from going down the wrong path. And that's what Extinction Rebellion does.

— Stephen Fry

This is a wake-up call to the world. It is prophetic. So I thank God for Extinction Rebellion and I pray that their voice may be heard—for all our sakes.

— The Bishop of Colchester

Time has run out. It's act now or face almost unimaginable consequences for life on Earth.

— Chris Packham

We demand that we are involved in the decision making. It's our futures, too.

— Ellie Goulding

Climate change due to human activity is not a theory, it is not an opinion, it is a fact. Denial of this fact in the interests of big money will lead to our extinction as a species.

— Margaret Atwood

The heroes of this historical moment are climate activists: they are trying to save us all — primarily from ourselves.

— Zadie Smith

We call on concerned global citizens to rise up and organise... joining the global movement that's now rebelling against extinction (e.g., Extinction Rebellion in the UK).

— Philip Pullman

The activists of Extinction Rebellion are leading the way in confronting this immense challenge, with courage and integrity, an achievement of historic significance that must be amplified with urgency.

— Noam Chomsky

PUBLIC SUPPORT & SIGNATORIES

In October 2018, 94 public figures — scientists, writers, and academics — signed a letter published in The Guardian supporting Extinction Rebellion. Signatories included:

- Rowan Williams
- Philip Pullman
- Naomi Klein
- Vandana Shiva
- Bill McKibben

In 2019, over 100 celebrities signed an open letter in support of Extinction Rebellion, acknowledging their own carbon footprints while emphasizing the need for systemic change. Signatories included:

- Benedict Cumberbatch
- Jude Law
- Bob Geldof
- Sienna Miller
- Steve Coogan
- Mel B
- Thom Yorke
- Ruby Wax
- Mark Rylance
- Ray Winstone

In July 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders declared it "a dark day for peaceful environmental protest and fundamental freedoms in the UK" when Roger was imprisoned for the longest prison sentence for nonviolent protest since the Napoleonic Wars.

More than 1,200 public figures rallied in support of Roger's imprisonment, alongside the Whole Truth Five.

Some of the notable figures who expressed their support included:

- Annie Lennox
- Peter Gabriel
- Jarvis Cocker
- Chris Packham
- James Hansen
- Chris Martin
- Danny Boyle
- Juliet Stevenson
- Matilda Swinton
- Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall
- Stewart Lee
- Jason Hickel
- Jeremy Corbyn MP
- Sandi Toksvig
- Sir Geoffrey Bindman KC
- Sir David King
- Yanis Varoufakis
- Helen Pankhurst
- Etiene Stott MBE
- Mick Whelan
- Bianca Jagger
- Kim Stanley Robinson
- Robert Macfarlane
- Alan Davies
- Simon Le Bon MBE
- Nish Kumar

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Roger Hallam is a leading figure in the global climate movement and co-founder of *Extinction Rebellion*, *Insulate Britain*, and *Just Stop Oil*—three of the most impactful campaigns in UK activism. A lifelong advocate for social justice, Roger left LSE in his twenties to join the peace movement, later spending 30 years as an organic farmer in Wales until extreme weather devastated his livelihood. That personal experience of climate breakdown led him to King's College London, where he conducted award-winning research on civil disobedience and the psychology of mobilisation.

In 2018, he authored *Common Sense for the 21st Century*, a widely read guide to launching mass movements. By 2023, the *New Statesman* ranked him the UK's 34th most influential progressive—second only to David Attenborough among environmentalists. Roger has advised movements across Europe and written for outlets from *The Guardian* to *The Daily Mail*, while appearing on programmes such as *BBC HardTalk* and *GB News*.

In July 2024, he was sentenced to five years in prison—the longest nonviolent protest sentence in modern UK history—for refusing to remain silent about climate collapse in court. His case made front-page news across the political spectrum. Roger continues to write from prison at rogerhallam.com.

Robin Boardman is the youngest co-founder of *Extinction Rebellion* and a prominent voice for youth-led climate action. He helped win the University of Bristol's full £2 million fossil fuel divestment and undertook a two-week hunger strike against Heathrow expansion. Now living with Long Covid, Robin focuses on translating complex research on civil resistance and climate science into accessible writing and talks for younger generations.

His work has been featured on *BBC News*, *Byline Times*, *Resilience*, and the *Centre for Nonviolent Conflict*. He also writes regularly at robinboardman.com.

Together, Roger and Robin are directors of *Revolution in the 21st Century*, whose volunteers helped produce this book, alongside other trainings and resources. You can find out more and get involved at rev21.earth.

SUICIDE

The Legal and Political Implications of Creating Endless Mass Death

ROGER HALLAM
with Robin Boardman

Hard Rain Books

For Frieda, for freedom

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Singer Louise Harris halts M25 traffic in November 2022 to demand an end to all new oil and gas licenses in the UK. (Image: Just Stop Oil)

PREFACE

For a week in November 2022, the M25 motorway was a site of nonviolent civil resistance to halt the licensing of new fossil fuel extraction in the North Sea.

This was a collective action by people who could not stand by while the UK government escalated climate breakdown - people who could not look away, people living in the truth, morally compelled to take the most effective action they could to reverse a criminally irresponsible policy.

It was a winnable demand, which was indeed won when Labour adopted a policy of not developing new oil and gas in its manifesto a few months after the actions. It became official policy when they entered government.

Like all previous strategies for grabbing government attention and sparking essential public debate, this action design was undertaken because previous methods had become ineffective and ignored. Rooted in nonviolence, it was based on historical evidence and activist experience. The tension created by nonviolent civil disobedience has significantly affected change in recent UK history. Extinction Rebellion's disruptive action, which involved blocking central London in 2019, led to Parliament declaring a climate emergency and the government creating its first net-zero policy.

The campaign's intention was to cause economic disruption, targeting a key artery of the carbon economy—the motorway around the capital. A dramatic, time-limited halt to traffic flow was achieved by 64 people over four days, as they climbed gantries spaced out around the M25 ring road. Preparation and safety were priorities.

I was one of five who tested the design in response to the unprecedented 40-degree heat in the UK in July 2022. Extensive training was developed to impart practical skills and emotional resilience, essential for all climbers and supporters. It was tough, both physically and emotionally. We acknowledge that it was intensely disruptive, and we hold ourselves accountable for this. I deeply regret the distress caused to those caught up in traffic holdups, but I also stand by the need for this visible, high-impact response in order to avert catastrophe.

In total, 64 people were arrested and charged for climbing, supporting, planning, or encouraging participation in the four days of nonviolent direct action. The majority, pleading not guilty, endured up to three months on remand and lengthy periods on curfew tags. All received harsh bail conditions. Those pleading guilty received prison sentences.

Five people charged with conspiracy to cause a public nuisance were exposed by a journalist infiltrating a recruitment Zoom call: Roger Hallam, Cressida Gethin, Lucia Whittaker De Abreu, Daniel Shaw, and myself. We self-represented in a trial in June 2024. We vowed not to be silenced in the face of injustice and to speak the truth to the jury, whatever the penalty.

Despite swearing an oath to the court to tell the whole truth, the judge shut us down while we were giving arguments in our defence. For resisting this, four of us were sent down on remand during the trial. Despite this, we managed, halfway through the trial, to have the existential reality of climate breakdown accepted as an agreed-upon fact, only for Judge Hehir to rule it irrelevant for consideration by the jury.

In addition to our legal defences being disallowed, this gave the jury little option but to return a guilty verdict. A week later, sentencing occurred, despite intervention by the United Nations rapporteur for environmental defenders. No consideration was given to our conscientious motivation to mitigate the longest sentences in UK modern history for nonviolent protest - five years for Roger, and four years for the rest of us.

Hugely heartening to those of us incarcerated, our trial, sentencing, custody, and appeal of sentence generated not only outrage but expressions of solidarity and direct action from a wide range of climate, human rights, and legal justice groups and individuals.

Early on in the trial, 11 people sat outside the Crown Court in silence, holding signs that read: *Juries have an absolute right to acquit a defendant according to their conscience.* They were arrested. In subsequent days, there were too many signholders to arrest. Hundreds protested our sentencing, and by the time our appeal of sentence, joined with other trial groups, was heard in January 2025 at the Royal Courts of Justice, over 1,000 people sat down in the road outside the court, completely blocking the Strand. This action, rooted in courage and conviction, marks not just a protest against a corrupt system but a commitment to ensuring that future generations will inherit a world worth saving. It's a reminder that when governments fail to act, it is up to us—the people—to demand change, no matter the cost.

Louise Lancaster, a fellow member of the Whole Truth Five prisoners His Majesty's Prison Bronzefield, Surrey February 2025.

FOREWORD

I am sitting with Roger Hallam, his gray hair pulled back in a ponytail, in the visitor's room at His Majesty's Prison Wayland. On the walls are large photographs of families picnicking on lawns, verdant meadows and children playing. The juxtaposition of the photographs, no doubt hung to give the prison visiting room a homey feel, is jarring. There is no escaping, especially with prison guards circulating around us, where we are. Roger and I sit on squat upholstered chairs and face each other across from a low, white plastic table. Roger's lanky frame tries to adjust to furniture designed to accommodate children.

Roger, one of the founders of Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil, is serving a five-year prison sentence for "causing a public nuisance without reasonable excuse."

He and his four co-defendants, who each received four-year sentences, were convicted for hosting a Zoom call in 2022 to organise activists to climb onto bridges over the M25, the main motorway that circles Greater London. The short-term aim was to stop traffic. The long-term aim was to force the government to stop new oil and gas licenses.

This was not a symbolic protest, exemplified by protesters hurling tomato soup at Van Gogh's Sunflowers, preserved by

protective glass, in the National Gallery in London. It was a protest designed to disrupt, as it did, commerce and the machinery of state. Although even the protestors who tossed soup at the painting, which was not damaged, received harsh prison terms of two years.

Global warming is expected to exceed 1.5 degree Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) in the 2020s and 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) before 2050, according to a 2023 study published in the Oxford Open Climate Change journal. NASA scientists warn that "a 2-degree rise in global temperatures is considered a critical threshold above which dangerous and cascading effects of human-generated climate change will occur."

The more the planet warms, the more extreme events, such as severe droughts, heatwaves, intense storms, and heavy rainfall, intensify. The extinction of animal and plant life accelerates - one million plant and animal species are currently threatened with extinction.

We are on the verge of tipping points, thresholds beyond which ice sheets, ocean circulation patterns, and other components of the climate system sustain and accelerate irreversible changes. There are also tipping points in ecosystems, which can become so degraded that no effort to save them can halt the effects of runaway climate change. At that point, "feedback loops" make environmental catastrophes accelerate each other. The game will be up. Nothing will save us.

Mass death from climate disasters is becoming the norm. The official death toll from Hurricane Helene is at least 227, making it the deadliest in mainland U.S. since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Anywhere from 5,000 to 15,000 people were killed last year in a single night by Cyclone Daniel in Libya.

These climate catastrophes, which occur routinely in the Global South, will soon characterise life for all of us.

"A billion refugees, the worst episode of suffering in human history," Roger says of the 2 degrees Celsius mark, "and then human extinction."

And yet, with the devastation outside their doors, including the Southwest United States enduring the highest temperatures ever recorded in October 2024, the global oligarchs have no intention of risking their privilege and power by disrupting an economy driven by fossil fuel and animal agriculture, which is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Livestock and their byproducts account for 32,000 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) released each year into the atmosphere and 51 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Instead of a rational response, we get more drilling and oil leases, more catastrophic storms, more wildfires, more droughts, toxic factory farms, the charade of the U.N. Conference of the Parties (COP) summits, the eradication of the rain forests and the false panacea of geoengineering, carbon capture and artificial intelligence.

Fossil fuel subsidies have increased worldwide, from $2 trillion to $7 trillion according to the International Monetary Fund, as governments seek to protect consumers from rising energy prices. This is despite the fact that two years ago, at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, governments promised to phase out fossil fuel subsidies.

The governments that facilitate genocide in Gaza are, not surprisingly, the overlords of global genocide. As the Swedish author and professor of human ecology, Andreas Malm, writes, "the destruction of Palestine is the destruction of the earth." Expanding Israeli fossil fuel production requires occupying Gaza's coastline and the removal of the Palestinians.

The connection between the genocide in Gaza and global mass death is not lost on the Global South, where climate refugees are dying on the open seas and in deserts as they attempt to flee north. UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, calculates that weather-related 'sudden onset hazards' - such as floods, storms, wildfires and extreme temperatures - forcibly displaced an annual average of 21.5 million people every year between 2008 and 2016. There

are now 260 million people in coastal areas - an increase of 100 million from three decades ago - who are at 'high risk' of being displaced by rising sea levels. Ninety percent of them live in poor developing countries and small island states.

As the ecocide and genocide in Gaza accelerates, we also get more draconian laws to criminalise protests. Laws designed to protect the fossil fuel industry in the U.K. include "conspiracy to interfere with national infrastructure" or the new "lock on" offense that can see a protester who attaches him or herself to an object, land or another person with some form of adhesive or handcuffs, in a manner that is capable of causing serious disruption, go to prison for six months and receive an unlimited fine.

The trajectory is clear. Burn the planet. Lock up dissidents. Censorship. Crush those who resist, especially those in the Global South, with industrial weapons and indiscriminate violence. And, if you are part of the privileged class, retreat into gated compounds that provide food, water, medical care, electricity and security that will be denied to the rest of us.

In the end, everyone will go the way of the dinosaurs, who, at least, were not responsible for their own demise. The tragedy is that most of the ruling criminal class will probably survive a little longer than the rest of us.

Collective suicide will define what we call human progress.

The three-week trial for the Just Stop Oil activists, like the court hearings for Julian Assange, denied the accused the right to submit objective evidence. The defendants were not permitted to speak about climate change, the motive for their protest. Roger, defying the ban, attempted to address the jury about the climate crisis. The judge ordered him arrested for contempt of court. He was removed from the courtroom by six police officers. When the judge sentenced Roger and his co-defendants, Daniel Shaw, Louise Lancaster, Lucia Whittaker De Abreu and Cressida Gethin, he told them that they had "crossed the line from concerned campaigner to fanatic."

The five activists were not convicted for taking part in the protests, but for its planning. The evidence used in court to convict them came from an online Zoom meeting that was captured by Scarlet Howes, a reporter posing as a supporter from the tabloid newspaper The Sun. No doubt some fossil fuel think tank is dreaming up a journalism prize for Howes now.

Sentences for those engaging in climate protests have steadily got harsher, longer than many of the sentences imposed on those who engaged in acts of violence during the racist riots in Southport in summer 2024.

I have long admired Roger, not only for his courage, but for his belief that resistance against radical evil is a moral imperative. Ultimately, it is not about what we can or cannot achieve. It is about defying, quite literally, when we speak of the ecocide, the forces of death to protect and nurture life.

I addressed a crowd in London to raise money for the legal defence of the five imprisoned activists. The organisers at the Kairos Centre played a recorded introduction that Roger had sent from his prison cell before my talk.

"Change," he said in the taped message, "comes about not through instrumental reason, that meaning, you do something in order to get something to happen, but rather because you cannot stand by, and so you act, in order to be what you are. The critical reason we're failing, in my view, is because we buy into the idea that they can oppress us by sending us to prison. While in fact, power resides in our fear of going to prison, not the act of doing it in itself. Once we realise it's all about fear, we have that lightbulb moment. It's not what they do to us, it's how we choose to react that determines their power."

"You carry out the good, not to create good outcomes," he says to me, "but because it is good, because it's truthful, because it's a beautiful thing to do, because it creates a metaphysical harmony, a balance."

The tactics employed by environmentalists over the past few

decades - marching, lobbying, voting, and petitioning - have failed.

In 1900, the burning of fossil fuels—mostly coal—produced approximately 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide. That number rose threefold by 1950. Today, the level is nearly 20 times higher than the 1900 figure. During those six decades the increase in CO2 was 100 times faster than what the Earth experienced during the transition from the last ice age, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

This is Roger's seventh time incarcerated in the British prison system, which is plagued by a lack of adequate funding, decaying infrastructure, reduced services, staff recruitment and retention issues and severe overcrowding.

"When I first went to prison, the guards could be sadists, ex-military from our colonial wars," he says. "Now they are usually polite, but nothing works."

Roger argues that if 10,000 people are willing to engage in civil resistance, which means accepting prison terms for non-violent civil disobedience, carry out grassroots educational campaigns and mobilise public assemblies, they can ignite one to two percent of the population to embrace the militancy to rupture the existing order.

He draws on the research by Erica Chenoweth, a political scientist at Harvard University, and Maria J. Stephan, who examined 100 years of violent and nonviolent resistance movements in their book "Why Civil Resistance Works." They concluded that nonviolent movements succeed twice as often as violent uprisings. Violent movements primarily work in civil wars or to end foreign occupations, they found. Nonviolent movements that succeed appeal to those within the power structure, especially the police and civil servants, who are cognizant of the corruption and decadence of the power elite and are willing to abandon them. And we only need one to five percent of the population actively working for the overthrow of a system, history has shown, to bring down even the most ruthless totalitarian structures.

"It's not only about changing the world," Roger says. "It's about

seeing the world in a different way, one that rejects the narrative of the dominant ideology. It is a re-enchantment of the world. It is about our spirit taking centre stage. This is where it belonged all the time. But the spirit only becomes real through action. The spirit is made flesh, to use some old language."

"I am not calling for an individualistic journey to personal enlightenment, which is a contradiction in terms," he says. "I am not calling for calmness that never leaves your head, that never gets you off the couch and into the streets. The spirit is in the street. The street is the spirit. The spirit is in the prison cell. The time for pretending is over. We are facing the end of the old world, and we are going to have to battle to create what comes next."

Roger is paying a steep price for resistance, for the moral life.

Henry David Thoreau refused to pay a poll tax to protest the U.S. invasion of Mexico, which he condemned as an effort to seize territory to expand slavery. He was arrested and jailed for tax evasion in 1846.

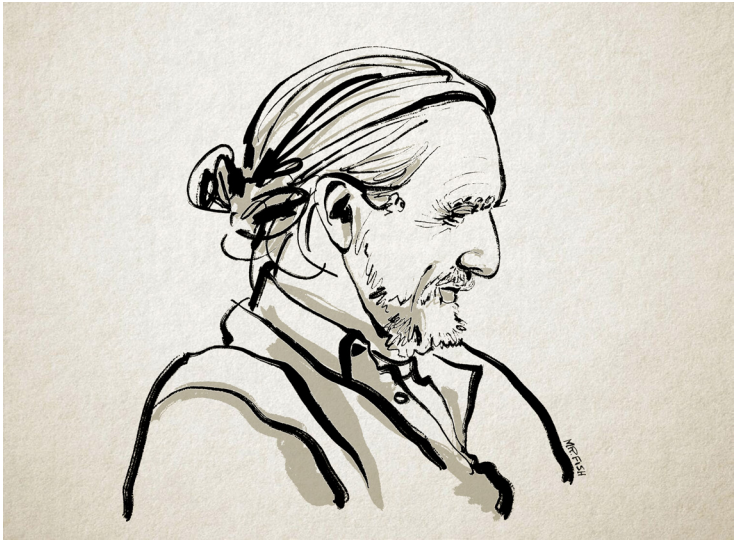
"I say, break the law," Thoreau wrote in his essay "Civil Disobedience." "Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Transcendentalist philosopher whose Divinity School address provoked outrage among the clergy and led Harvard University not to invite him back to speak for another thirty years, visited Thoreau in jail.

"Henry, what are you doing in here?" Emerson asked.

"What are you doing out there?" Thoreau responded.

Chris Hedges
Norfolk, England October 2024



Roger Hallam - Mr. Fish (2024)

INTRODUCTION

I've just been sentenced to 5 years in prison.
The longest ever sentence for nonviolent direct action.

The 'crime'?

Giving a talk on civil disobedience as an effective, evidence-based method for **stopping the elite from putting enough carbon in the atmosphere to make us extinct.**

I have given hundreds of similar speeches encouraging nonviolent action and have never been arrested for it. This time, I was an advisor to the M25 motorway disruption, recommending the action to wake up the British public because we are facing societal collapse.

I was not part of the planning or action itself.

In the trial, I swore before God to tell the truth. The truth is the science. The science is clear. We are heading for billions of deaths and ecological collapse. To prove this, I tried to present the jury with a 250-page dossier of leading scientists' research as evidence in my defence. The judge stopped this - **climate science is now illegal in the British courtroom.**

I then began to speak about the apocalyptic conditions humanity faces - floods, wildfires, mass heat deaths - and was silenced by the judge. **He sent out the jury and threatened to arrest me if**

I didn't stop. Instead, I stayed in the dock and argued that until I was given the right to complete my defence, I would not move. Even the prosecution tried to argue in my defence, and the judge let me continue.

When the jury had shuffled in again, I spoke about the legal concept of "equality of arms" – that as the prosecution had made its case over a whole week, I had a right to an equal opportunity. I mentioned various cases where juries had acquitted defendants after hearing the facts, such as when Extinction Rebellion activists cracked Shell's windows in 2018. That jury found it a reasonable action in response to criminal destruction. The Dutch Supreme Court has even said that all governments have a legal obligation to prevent the emission of greenhouse gases. While the prosecution accepted (for the first time in British history) that emissions pose an existential threat, they still tried to convict us for public nuisance rather than praise us for attempting to mitigate those emissions. Given the truth of the existential threat, there were overwhelming grounds to be involved in a plan to cause some disruption to the M25.

In British law on public nuisance, there is a 'reasonable excuse' clause. Science says there is an overwhelming threat to my life, my children, you and your children. To argue that there is not a reasonable excuse directly defies the wish of this legislation. Things are happening that cause harm – people are engaged in physical acts to stop that harm – it doesn't matter whether it's a protest or not.

As I began to offer up some case law, the judge kept intervening, telling me I was wasting his time and ordering the jury to disregard me. To illustrate that I was not talking about my motivations but speaking about real necessity, I referred to a famous case over a decision to operate on conjoined twins with the likelihood that one would die. In this dilemma, I cited the 19th-century principle that the action was necessary if the threat faced was inevitable and irrevocable, that no more should be done than was essential, and

that it must be proportionate. I argued that there was a "duress of circumstances" including **the objective danger I've experienced as a farmer unable to grow food**, and the global danger of 'food insecurity' – a euphemism for famine and starvation.

There has never been a moment in history where 'necessity' has been more supported by the evidence – more than 10,000 scientific and peer-reviewed papers have been published that indicate an outcome of mass starvation and death from man-made climate collapse.

In response, Judge Hehir called for an early lunch and dismissed the jury. He turned to me and warned that I wasn't a lawyer and that "this isn't the Roger Hallam show."

He then gave me just 15 more minutes to put forward my "beliefs". But this isn't belief - it's the objective threat of destruction of property and livelihoods of billions of people and the secondary effects of famine: war, rape, and torture.

I outlined four characteristics of the effects of emitting greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere, describing them as easy to understand, but unique to human experience, and so horrific that they are impossible to assimilate.

1. **They have universal effects** – what's emitted in India affects the USA, a melting Arctic affects Argentina and so on.

2. The ultimate consequence of GHGs in the atmosphere is that **you destroy the basis of life** – some experts say for 100,000 years, others 50 million, and some say the Earth will simply become like Venus. In other words, a wealthy elite comprising 1% of the global population is going to be responsible for destroying everything we know, perhaps forever.

3. The Earth has reached a 1.5˚C rise in temperature already, and at some point in the next decade, we'll have triggered geological tipping points – **regardless of any action, we have started unstoppable change**. In other words, we don't have time to not pull that person from in front of the lorry, if we don't act now, it will be too late. Some scientists say it's already too late – the UN

has stated that we have only two years to make radical changes – so we're not just trying to prevent people from doing bad things, but to stop them from doing things that will create lasting harm.

4. **There is a serious possibility of human extinction** as a result of pumping GHGs into the atmosphere, so we're talking about a crime fundamentally different from any other in history. This, I said, is why I want to present expert evidence to the jury.

The judge, showing obvious disdain, told me to wrap up in a few minutes.

Returning to the idea of 'necessity', I gave more examples. We agree that if a man pulls a dagger out in a pub and someone else pushes him and disarms him, then there would be no question of prosecution.

In Ireland, a cyclist who stopped and intervened when an immigrant was being attacked became a national hero. But what if someone plants a bomb under the table in a pub, set to explode in 30 minutes? If you push him over, grab the bomb and take it out to the police, you wouldn't be prosecuted, even though the harm you're trying to prevent is in the future.

And what about those people pulling down houses in the Great Fire of London? Their action was to try and prevent harm in other parts of London if the fire spread. So, just because something causes damage over a long time or space is irrelevant – it comes down to causality. The fact that emissions will cause damage across the planet for millions of years is not a reason to stop it from coming into court. In fact, the massive extent of the time and space is the very reason it should be in every court.

At this point, the judge sent the jury home and again insulted me for defending myself. He called me an "amateur lawyer" getting "amateur results".

The next day, I reminded the courtroom that I was under oath to tell the whole truth and would continue with my evidence. The judge immediately ordered the jury out, and when I continued to declare I was under an obligation to continue, the public gallery

was cleared, and I was warned I would be arrested if I didn't return to my seat.

Then three police officers arrived. I said I would not resist, but also would not assist in my own arrest. As they forcibly dragged me towards the prisoner dock, I said to nearby journalists that this was "democracy in action" - nonviolent resistance to a grossly unjust system. This obscene miscarriage of justice happened to me five times throughout the trial. What indignity for British justice.

I received no good reason why I could not tell the jury what is blindingly obvious - that the elite putting carbon in the atmosphere will kill billions.

Without the whole truth, it is not a fair trial.

If thousands of people were going to die further up that motorway, we would have a reasonable excuse to disrupt it. Except it's not further up the motorway - it's everyone, all around us. Humanity, gone forever.

The judge bizarrely began the next morning by reading out my Twitter feed, which alerted my followers to the fact I wasn't allowed to give my whole defence, and they called for support for a presence outside the court. But then he moved on to gleefully reading some of the various trolls on my feed – why this was any part of a serious trial, no one could fathom. I was ordered to take them down by lunchtime or face contempt of court. **This is a British judge in 2024.**

Meanwhile, the UN special rapporteur for Environmental Defenders, Michel Forst sat watching in the gallery. He had previously put out a statement about the injustice of our treatment. It states that the UK may be breaching international law regarding the rights of environmental protesters.

I stood up and told the jury that, after they had been ejected the previous day, I had been arrested and removed, but that they had a right to hear my evidence. Once again, the judge ordered the jury out and forcibly removed me. The UN rapporteur watched as I was dragged away. I was sent to prison and couldn't hear the rest

of the day's trial.

Afterwards, the judge falsely claimed that I was behind the jury protection campaign, Defend Our Juries, and had 'conned' vulnerable people into coming to the court. **No evidence was given**. Fair, right?

The next day, I again explained that blocking motorways has direct effects on society, e.g. the farmers' protests quickly changed EU policy, and road protests held fuel prices down. The judge dismissed this by asking whether the action had any effect on global temperatures and told me to sit down. I stayed standing and the judge just left the courtroom. **What?** I even looked to the prosecution for help again with the judge's incoherent madness.

When he came back, he started quoting his favourite movie, Goodfellas, and asked me, "What are you still doing here?". Then he ordered me arrested and sent to prison, again.

While I was jailed, the judge gave my friends a pathetic 15 minutes each to defend themselves. They also spoke of the necessity for action against mass death from carbon emissions, and the judge ordered them all to be arrested. After this gagging, people began to call us the #WholeTruthFive.

Finally, we came to the prosecution's closing statement, where, unbelievably, **they argued that the jury must take direction from the judge, that the rule of law keeps our society free from collapse, and that climate change is irrelevant**. I, of course, was dismissed as someone who "waffles about the cause". Not a co-founder of the most influential climate movement in the world, and an academic researching social change. Show trials are about lies, not justice.

In response, I gave my final statement, from behind the glass panel of the dock, reminding jurors they must be sure, not almost sure or on the verge of being sure, and that **they must consider ALL the evidence**. They must also be sure that they have actually been given all the evidence. I reminded them of the plaque in the Old Bailey that refers to a 1670 trial and confirms they can acquit

based on their conscience without having to give an explanation and without any legal repercussions.

There are two elements to my indictment - conspiracy and disruption. The prosecution had presented what they say is 'powerful evidence' of involvement in the plan, but this is not the same as 'conclusive evidence'. I was actually on Zoom to make arguments for action; I was not directly involved in the actual planning.

What does it say about civil liberties if people are imprisoned for making speeches? I offered an alternative explanation for what happened – that a Murdoch-owned newspaper, the Sun, had a journalist who just wanted to make a film of my arrest and so recorded and leaked the public Zoom meeting to the police.

Let me remind you that for this, I have already been in prison for four months in 2022 without a trial and have had an electronic tag with an 11 pm curfew ever since.

Even during my closing statement, the judge tried to force me to be silent. But I argued that I just wanted the jury to hear the other defendants and myself and to present them with three or four expert witnesses to give the whole evidence. I simply wanted to ask them to consider doing what many other juries have done, to let good people go free when they are persecuted by the state.

This was about facts, not beliefs. Without facts, this is not a 'functioning democracy' but a government that is facilitating the destruction and death of our population. That's why UN people sat in on the trial – because we do NOT have a functioning democratic state. If you go and ask people in the street, many would laugh at the idea that they have a say in how this country is run. Plenty of expert witnesses would come and tell us we live in a capitalist democracy, a democracy for the rich. In other words, no kind of democracy at all.

In the end, I said to the jury that if I speak the truth to them I may end up in prison. If the lawyers speak the truth to them they may lose their jobs. **If the jury speaks the truth, nothing will**

happen to them. I begged them to consult their conscience and ask themselves if they were really sure we didn't have a reasonable excuse.

The result of this kangaroo court?

You have guessed it. The jury representative stood up the next day, and one by one gave guilty verdicts for all of us, all unanimous.

After the verdict, the judge accused me of fraud and 'grifting' because my social media post asked for donations towards 'court fees'. A slight miswording by my friend who writes the posts, as there were no such fees in this trial. However, there are significant costs associated with the entire legal team supporting us, as well as the potential consequences of imprisonment.

The judge then slandered me by suggesting to the jurors that if I was telling lies to obtain money, I might be telling other people lies, and perhaps other protesters outside the court were being misled. He said one of them had been an elderly man who was hard of hearing, and he was worried I was exploiting vulnerable people. The public gallery gasped. The man in question was a retired GP in full possession of his faculties with a keen knowledge of the issues – what an insult, and what baseless accusations.

To top it off, he said I was 'incapable of introspection'. Guess I'll have plenty of time for that now…

The judge finished his attacks by then personally thanking the jury for not being intimidated and said, "Well done". He said he didn't care what we thought of him. He was just "doing his job".

This is the banality of evil all over again.

He claimed our conviction was just a result of our "single issue fanaticism". Again, no bias there from a judge who is planning to fly off on holiday, just when Just Stop Oil might be planning to disrupt airports…

Repression is increasing around the world. Amnesty International has put out a report on the systematic state attacks on peaceful protest. Either we resist the carbon elites' repression and build a true democracy, led by ordinary people in Citizens' Assemblies, or as with Covid, ecological and economic shocks will

spark chaos and fascism. We've seen it over and over again.

It's time to say 'never again'.

Never again will we let fascism produce a holocaust.

Never again will we fail to tell the whole truth: that we face the greatest holocaust ever known, a worldwide gas chamber of carbon that could kill us all.

Today, it was me who was imprisoned for telling the truth.

Next, it could be you.

Join the resistance before it's too late.

1

SUICIDAL PRISONS OF OUR OWN MAKING

I'm writing this from a British prison. For years, I've been thinking about putting these thoughts to paper, but it's only now, locked in a cell, that I have the time - and the urgency - to do so. Over the past few years, I've represented myself in four Crown Court cases, gaining firsthand experience of the irrationalities and pathologies of the British legal system.

The outcomes of these trials reveal something deeply troubling about the state of our democracy. In my first two trials, I was acquitted by the jury. In the third, the judge manipulated the process, altering his directions to the jury after we had already made our final arguments. I'm currently appealing that case. My latest trial, which concluded in July 2024, was perhaps the most shocking. Like all recent 'climate trials', it was marked by a refusal to allow us a proper defence. We were given just 20 minutes to present our beliefs; 20 minutes to justify why we are fighting for the survival of our planet. By the end, four of us were sentenced before even hearing the verdicts. I was handed a five-year sentence - the longest for civil disobedience in the UK since World War Two.

Our case made the front pages of *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, and *The Telegraph*. But what these headlines really highlight is how quickly Britain's legal and political systems are

descending into repression. Thousands of climate activists have been arrested, and hundreds of us have been imprisoned. The message is clear: dissent will not be tolerated, no matter how just the cause.

Initially, I planned to write only about the legal principle of necessity and the fallacy that the UK is a functioning democracy, where all protest should be channelled through elections. But my experiences in court pushed me to take a broader view. This book is about more than just the judiciary - it's about the system that claims to uphold democracy while endangering humanity.

No functioning democracy would continue to pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere in the 2020s. Yet here we are. The courts argue that our protests are unnecessary because we live in a democracy where elections can achieve change. But this argument collapses when you recognise that our political institutions are complicit in the very destruction we're protesting. They are, in fact, facilitating a crime - against humanity, against nature, against future generations.

In this book, I'll explore why the judiciary has failed to protect us from this criminality. Part of the problem lies in the cognitive dissonance of the elites - the lawyers, judges, and politicians who cannot seem to grasp the urgency of our situation. Even highly educated professionals, trained to deal with complex issues, seem blind to the scale of the crisis. As I saw during my recent trial, where Judge Christopher Hehir called me a "fanatic" while denying me the right to a full defence, this blindness is not just a personal failing - it's systemic.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt described this failure of understanding as the "banality of evil". She coined the term while analysing the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a man who committed Nazi atrocities not out of malice but because he simply followed orders, detached from the moral implications of his actions. We are seeing the same kind of detachment today. The elites are not malicious; they're simply unable to see beyond the narrow confines

of their roles. And in that blindness, they are complicit in the mass destruction of life on Earth.

The historian Arnold Toynbee once said "Civilizations are not murdered; they commit suicide." That's where we are now. This system - this neoliberal, capitalist machine - isn't just extracting resources and exploiting the poor, as previous systems have done. It's actively destroying the future of everyone, including the rich and powerful. It's a mass death project we need to stop.

The prisons we are building are not just physical cells like the one I'm sitting in now. They are mental and moral prisons created by a system that has lost the ability to think clearly, to reason, to act in defence of life itself. And it is this inability to think - the very thing that should define us as rational beings - that lies at the heart of the disaster we are entering.

In many ways, writing this book feels like a 'goodbye to all that.' I have spent years researching how to confront entrenched power, first at Swansea University and then at King's College London. What became clear early on is that while reason is essential, it's not enough. Social change requires something more: a willingness to confront power directly, to break the rules when the rules no longer serve justice.

And yet, despite everything, I still hold out hope. Imagine if judges and lawyers refused to prosecute climate activists until we were given a fair defence. Imagine if they went on strike, demanding the government stop bowing to fossil fuel interests. It sounds like fantasy, but so did the idea of a civil rights movement in America, or the abolition of slavery.

Writing about Vichy France's complicity with Nazi Germany, Robert Paxton concluded: "There come cruel times when, to save a nation's deepest values, one must disobey the state." The 2020s are such a time. We must disobey not out of fanaticism, but out of a deep commitment to life, to justice, to the future.

This book is my attempt to explain why—and how—we must disobey while we still can.

2

HORROR STORIES AND KILLER FACTS

I like rationality, the cool, calm investigation of evidence and argument. I find it deeply troubling when I encounter people who describe themselves as rationalists, yet don't give a damn about evidence or argument.

Yes, I'm talking about the British judiciary.

Sometimes I feel like a lone believer, surrounded by a raging mob screaming for my blood because I suggest a reality that fundamentally violates their worldview.

Am I being overdramatic? Well, I am in a prison cell for speaking out, so maybe not. But perhaps the situation is even worse than I thought. The reality we face is like a dark, endless silence. It's like Freud's concept of the death wish, a human drive that lurks in all of us towards death and destruction, manifesting through aggression, repetition compulsion, and self-destructiveness.

This feels disturbingly relevant in the context of our civilisation. Our addiction to fossil fuels, our refusal to change despite overwhelming evidence, might be expressions of this drive. It's not just that we're blindly marching towards destruction; deep down, we might actually be choosing it. A societal death wish, playing out on a global scale.

Freud's idea helps to explain why, even though we understand

the consequences, we continue accelerating toward catastrophe. It's as if, on some level, we're resigned to - or even craving - the end. This unconscious drive might explain why those in power find it so hard to break free from the systems that are destroying us. It's not just ignorance or denial; it's something deeper, an underlying psychological pull toward self-annihilation.

The silence, the inaction, the refusal to face reality, that might be the death wish manifesting in our culture. And the terrifying part isn't just that we're being swept along by forces beyond our control; it's that, on some level, we might be complicit.

In my hundreds of climate talks, I've learned that facts, to be persuasive, need to be embedded in emotionally relevant stories. We need to start slowly, like a detective building a case. Start with the familiar, the obvious, and gradually reveal a sequence of logical steps until the audience is faced with an undeniable conclusion. It was Mrs. Peacock with the dagger in the library!

Part of what makes this satisfying is the ultimate revelation: our so-called social superiors are cold-blooded murderers. It is the ultimate whodunnit, except this time, it's real.

My climate talks follow this approach. They begin with the familiar and end with the ultimate exposé: our elites, respectable on the surface, are ensuring that we all die. We've all become disposable.

Let's start with an everyday horror story: the trip to the doctor. The lump. The X-ray. The specialist's report. You're sitting there, waiting for the results. You have cancer. It's terminal. You have six months.

We all know this story. We understand its progression. The doctor is a trusted messenger, delivering the message with precision and care. Serious situations demand three things: a trusted expert, solid data, and the latest research. No controversy there. When you're told you have terminal cancer, you want the X-rays, the data, the hard facts. And you're expected to accept them, however painful they are.

This is a societal expectation. Those who deny these facts are seen as delusional.

But what about climate change? We apply these rational principles to health crises, but when it comes to the survival of our entire civilisation, we conveniently ignore the killer facts. We cherry-pick minor details, "my heart is functioning fine, my arm is healing", while ignoring the reality that our lungs have failed. And like the body, our planet can't survive without its critical systems.

This is where we need killer facts. Facts that override the noise, showing the inescapable truth of our situation. And right now, the fact is that if we don't change course, our civilisation is terminal.

At this point, it might be helpful to explore some cognitive errors that can lead us astray. For instance, it is unnecessary to argue over the obvious issues that are settled and not controversial. When scientists write a research paper, they don't need to prove established facts like the existence of gravity. The debate has already occurred, and the matter is settled. Similarly, we don't need to prove that if the lungs fail, the body cannot survive. Arguing over this is a distraction. Instead, we should focus on how much the lungs are failing.

Distractions like red herrings and cherry-picking steer us away from what's crucial, away from focusing on the vital aspects of the situation. Unfortunately, repetition can also create a cognitive error, where something unimportant becomes perceived as the main issue. For example, a prosecutor might spend hours on insufficient evidence to create the illusion of lots of evidence, making us confuse quantity with quality.

This was evident in my penultimate trial, where more than 1,000 pages of evidence were presented by the prosecution over two weeks. Their goal was to establish that we could possibly have committed a certain act, but that wasn't the charge. The focus should have been on what would necessarily have happened, not on speculation. You cannot convict on possibility alone, no matter how much 'evidence' you present.

This tactic works. People get distracted, stop thinking about the lungs, and focus on how well the arm is doing. It's comforting, but it's irrational. It's the lungs, stupid!

Another cognitive error we must address is the confusion over the likelihood of a future event, like the certainty of a terminal cancer diagnosis. The temptation is to think that if something isn't 100% certain, it isn't true. This creates confusion, intentional or not, suggesting that predictions must be absolutely certain to act on them. But no prediction of the future can be 100% certain. Does that mean we should ignore warnings from doctors or specialists who tell us we're going to die of cancer? Of course not. Even though a miracle isn't impossible, it's highly unlikely.

Conversely, if you're told you need immediate surgery to survive, you act without hesitation. You don't wait for absolute certainty - it's an emergency, and not just for you because your life affects others. This is how we handle serious matters in our culture: we trust the experts, examine the facts, and act based on the killer facts, not on hopeful distractions.

Unfortunately, while we've learned to apply this rationality in medicine, we still fail to apply it to Earth system science.

So now, let's transition to this next step. We all agree that we trust doctors to inform us about our health. We rely on data, specialists, and the latest research. We focus on the vital organs, the lungs, heart, brain, to determine whether the body will live or die.

The Earth system is much the same. Like our bodies, it can die; like our lungs, it cannot be replaced. Once we lose critical elements of the system, they're gone for good. There is no external source of air from another planet. You don't negotiate with death when it comes to the survival of vital systems, just as we don't negotiate with cancer.

Certain elements are essential for the planet's survival, just as lungs and the heart are essential for a human body. We may survive with some damage to minor systems, but when we lose the critical ones, it's game over. No discussion.

The same principle applies to the Earth. The atmosphere is vital; without it, there is no life. While a region of the planet may turn to desert, life on Earth can continue as long as essential elements like water and air remain. However, if there is no water or air, life cannot survive. Similarly, humanity is a subsystem of life on Earth. We, too, face killer facts. While some habitats may perish, and civilisations may collapse, human life can persist. But without food, we die within months; without water, we last days; without oxygen, it is only a few minutes.

There are also absolute limits related to temperature. Beyond specific thresholds, life itself becomes impossible. If temperatures rise too high, death can occur within hours.

This is not negotiable. While it's uncomfortable to think about these limits, no rational person disputes the facts. Distractions only obscure the reality: What if we find new oxygen sources? What if we invent thicker coats? The limits are as unchangeable as gravity.

One of the most critical factors for humanity is the atmosphere, a determinant of temperature and water availability, functioning like the lungs of the planet. The science is settled: when greenhouse gases are emitted, they trap heat, raising temperatures in the air, land, and sea. The numbers are well known. We are currently at 420 parts per million (ppm) of CO_2, up from 280 ppm before the Industrial Revolution. Including other greenhouse gases, we're heading towards over 500 ppm. This is a direct cause of rising temperatures, now 1.5°C higher than 150 years ago.

The human consequences have been documented in peer-reviewed science. At these levels of warming, a quarter of the planet's inhabited land will become uninhabitable, forcing a billion people to become refugees.

As we approach 3°C, the number rises to two billion. At 4°C, half the land becomes uninhabitable, displacing half the global population. At 5°C, it's effectively the end for humanity. Perhaps only a billion people will survive, out of today's eight billion.

Before our minds get clouded with 'what ifs' let's return to a clear focus on killer facts. In cases of terminal lung cancer, experts give us informed estimates based on the severity of disease. With 10% of the lungs diseased, surgery offers a 90% chance of survival. But at 50%, the odds drop to 5%. At this point, the disease is effectively terminal.

This is serious. We are not talking about a wound that can heal - we are talking about the end of life.

The same applies to global temperatures. Once they rise beyond certain thresholds, survival becomes impossible. It's not just another crisis; it's terminal. This is a fact.

Once we accept this irrefutable reality, we can move on to analyse the stages between now and that terminal point.

At 2°C, a billion people will be displaced. The global trading system will collapse, economies will fall into permanent depression, and many poorer countries will face social collapse.

At 3°C to 4°C, civilisation itself is at risk. Starvation, violence, and systemic breakdown could bring us back to pre-industrial times. Life expectancy may fall to 40 years, undoing generations of progress in a matter of decades.

At 5°C, effective extinction becomes inevitable; humanity may not survive more than a few generations.

In this way, we have thickened our narrative with more detail: the physical statistics at 2°C, 3°C, and 4°C, along with the killer facts regarding what each of these levels means for humanity, pain, and death.

But this is not the end of the story. It's a massive shock, and it's both responsible and compassionate to elaborate on the dynamics involved. Just as a specialist might show you more X-rays and share the latest research about your condition, we need a fuller understanding of the geophysical and biological realities of our planet. This process may take time, involving multiple layers of explanation and deep analysis.

To fully grasp Earth science, we need a crash course in how the

planet's systems function and interact. However, it's also important to recognise when scepticism crosses the line into irrational denial. If one starts questioning the functioning of the X-ray machine itself, that's when we've moved from healthy inquiry into the territory of unproductive doubt. Climate science is robust, and questioning the fundamentals of data because you dislike the implications won't change the reality.

Now, let's explore several key elements within the Earth's system, including drivers and lag effects, processes that have already begun but have yet to manifest fully.

The central phenomenon here is the surge in global temperatures caused by greenhouse gas emissions. This relationship is straightforward: A causes B. However, the effect does not remain isolated; it ripples through the entire system. This is why climate change is often described as a 'hyperobject'. It is pervasive, influencing every aspect of life on Earth. No social element or process is immune. Whether it is leisure activities like playing golf, civic processes like elections, or crucial services like healthcare, everything is connected, and everything is at risk of disruption or collapse.

As temperatures rise, pressure on each subsystem grows. But this pressure doesn't increase in a neat, linear fashion. These subsystems, like ecosystems, agriculture, and human infrastructure, have built-in resilience. They can absorb stress up to a point. However, beyond certain thresholds - tipping points - these systems undergo abrupt phase transitions, shifting suddenly from stability to chaos.

Moreover, these subsystems don't exist in isolation. They are tightly interwoven, forming a complex ecological network. A tipping point in one subsystem can trigger cascading effects in others. This creates what we call a super-exponential crash; a collapse that accelerates rapidly as multiple systems break down at the same time. To predict when and how this will occur, we must closely study each subsystem, the relevant data, and their interactions over time.

Let's begin with heat. Most crops cannot grow at temperatures above 30°C, and once the world exceeds an average 2°C of warming, hundreds of millions of people will need to move as their crops begin to fail. These regions will essentially turn into deserts. Additionally, the estimate of one billion people displaced refers only to the direct impacts of heat, the numbers will rise as famine spreads.

Another tipping point is found in human biology. At 35°C and 100% humidity, the human body cannot cool itself, leading to death within six hours. This is the 'wet bulb' effect when there is no more cooling through evaporation. While 100% humidity is rare, rising temperatures lower the threshold at which humidity becomes fatal, making this phenomenon a growing risk to human survival.

Each degree of warming inches us closer to catastrophic tipping points, threatening to displace billions of people and dismantle the very fabric of our civilisation. We cannot afford to be distracted by false reassurances or cherry-picked data that soothe our anxieties while masking the impending crises; just as a patient cannot negotiate with cancer, we cannot negotiate with the Earth's vital systems.

Embracing the reality of our situation with urgency and clarity is key, because understanding the interconnectedness of Earth's systems can catalyse a radical shift in our approach to climate action. It is time to fuse emotional resonance with empirical evidence, compelling us to act decisively. The future of humanity depends on our willingness to confront the whole truth and transform our collective fear into a movement for survival and renewal. Together, we can build a truly democratic society that respects such facts and our need to act on them.

3

THE LAW OF NECESSITY

If we assume the world operates on rational principles, it is reasonable to suggest that this mass death scenario would profoundly impact the legal and political systems of any modern democratic state, given the enormity of the crisis we face.

The facts are clear: law and government fundamentally exist to protect citizens' lives. This principle serves as the foundation for their existence. Two key ideas underpin this. First, there is a distinction between right and wrong. Basic morality usually starts with the principle that causing harm, without just cause, is wrong and should be prevented. For example, if Mrs. Peacock has murdered Mr. Green, that act is inherently wrong.

Second, we rely on 'reason' to ascertain the truth of events. If Mrs. Peacock has an alibi proving she was elsewhere at the time of the murder, that serves as a reasonable defence against her guilt. While these concepts may seem obvious, we often overlook their significance. We must begin with the basics, the nature of facts. Why are facts important? Because ignoring them is perilous.

To foster a humane society, we must maintain a sense of morality and a method for determining what is true and what is not. Therefore, we should approach this discussion slowly; a guiding principle for this book. In this section on legalities and the next on

politics, we will methodically examine the situation, mapping the landscape and gradually building an understanding of our current predicament. This deliberate pace allows us to identify cognitive errors and biases that may distort our perception of reality.

We will begin by confronting the emotional realities we face, as outlined earlier. This is profoundly upsetting. We are entering a world that exceeds 2°C of average global heating. This is not just a statistic; it translates into starvation, violence, and displacement. The estimate of one billion people, one thousand million, forced to leave their homes, represents unimaginable suffering. This is hell on Earth.

This hell signifies a gradual but relentless decline in quality of life: dwindling resources, reduced services, increased stress, and diminished security. This decline is compounded by sudden, catastrophic events, extreme heat, devastating storms, and the breakdown of public order.

Revulsion and disgust are not the enemies of reason; in fact, research shows that without emotion, we struggle to reason effectively or understand our true desires. These emotions drive several fundamental propositions. First, knowingly engaging in activities that contribute to this chaos must be deemed illegal. Second, the legal system should hold the government accountable, as the government bears the responsibility to prevent such egregious criminality. The government must be compelled to slash emissions and cease harmful practices; it is difficult to imagine how these practices could be more wrong.

This brings us to the central theme of this section: necessity. There are two sides to this concept. It is necessary to act to prevent harm; and failing to act results in harm. Inaction allows harm to occur, making action imperative. This necessity is rational, grounded in an evidence-driven assessment of our circumstances, and morally justified; stopping harm is the right thing to do.

In law, we must recognise that actions taken to stop harm may also create harm. Necessity is justified when the harm being

prevented is significantly less than the harm caused. Thus, we can categorise actions into three groups:

- **Actions that stop harm without causing any harm**. These are clearly rational, moral, and legal.
- **Actions that cause harm without preventing any harm.** These are irrational, immoral, and illegal.
- **Actions that aim to prevent harm while causing some harm.** Here, the 'necessity' defence argues that the action prevents more harm than it causes. Whether this is true must be determined through evidence.

This framework outlines the basic structure of our situation and the legal implications of our necessary actions. I won't delve into all UK laws, but it's important to note a family of legal circumstances that share a similar structure of defence. This includes the straightforward laws of 'Right of Necessity' and 'Self-Defence', as well as those incorporating clauses like 'without reasonable excuse'. In these cases, the law recognises that illegal acts, such as 'criminal damage' or 'conspiracy to cause public nuisance', can sometimes be justified.

Another relevant concept is 'consent', which can become quite complex (as I learned during a five-week trial where this was the defence). Broadly, this involves situations where some harm is inflicted, and the defendant genuinely believes that, had the harmed party been aware of all circumstances surrounding the action, they would have consented to it.

To illustrate how these legal frameworks work, we can look at notable examples and case law where courts have acquitted individuals based on necessity defences:

- **Shouting "Fire!" in a theatre:** If there is a fire, and people will die without immediate evacuation, the harm caused by disrupting a performance is minimal compared to the potential deaths from the fire. The action taken is proportional to the harm prevented. **Verdict:** Not guilty.
- **Intervening to stop a shooting:** If someone attempts to

shoot a friend in a pub and another person pushes the assailant to the ground, this creates harm but prevents the death of their friend. Again, the situation is clear, and the action is proportional. Not guilty.

- **Separating conjoined twins:** A doctor faces a moral dilemma when presented with two newborn conjoined twins who will die within days if not separated. The act of separation, which may result in the death of one or both twins, is justified because failing to act guarantees their deaths. This decision must be made before the harm occurs, like the pub example. Not guilty.
- **Euthanising an injured dog:** When a person finds a severely injured and suffering pet, they may decide to euthanise it to prevent further suffering. The defence here is based on the belief that the owner, if aware of the circumstances, would have consented to the action, thus preventing greater harm. Not guilty.
- **The Great Fire of London (17th century):** To prevent the spread of a devastating fire, people caused criminal damage by demolishing properties to create a firebreak. Although this involved harm, the necessity to protect the city justified their actions, providing a reasonable excuse. Not guilty.

In these examples, the actions taken are concrete, and the resulting harm is clear. A central question arises: Were the actions proportionate to the harm they aimed to prevent? These cases illustrate that relevant actions intended to stop harm can differ significantly. For instance, the harm prevented can be directly caused by the defendant's actions (like pushing the gunman) or can be social and communicative (like shouting "Fire!").

Additionally, the scale of harm needing prevention can vary, from interpersonal incidents (the gunman scenario) to larger social implications (as in the Great Fire). Context is crucial, and legal defences rely on establishing the proportionality and necessity of actions taken. For instance, in the theatre example, the action aims

to protect potentially hundreds of people, while the Great Fire involved demolishing buildings to prevent harm to numerous lives, potentially affecting thousands. A key aspect of these justifications is the 'now or never' element, where clear time constraints exist in scenarios such as saving the twins, extinguishing fires, and mitigating city disasters.

This brings us to consider the probability of future harm. While fires may put themselves out, or gunmen may or may not pull the trigger, we need concrete evidence of the imminent harm that must be stopped or mitigated.

We can categorise evidence into two broad classes:

- Big-picture evidence
- Detailed evidence

In the case of the Great Fire, we first assess the overarching killer facts: was there an active fire? On confirming the presence of a fire, we examine the defendants' actions: were their interventions related to the fire's progression, and were they likely to be effective? If actions were taken in the wrong part of the city or motivated by looting, the justification for those actions could be undermined. Ultimately, the strength of the defence hinges on the evidence presented.

The defence of necessity is not just a theoretical construct; it is being actively tested in the British courts, where the urgent need to address our destruction from carbon emissions confronts outdated legal paradigms defending the fossil fuel status quo. As we are increasingly repressed, the intersection of law and climate action becomes a crucial battleground.

When it comes to our current 'Great Fire', the consequences of greenhouse gas emissions, we recognise the tangible physical events at stake. The alleged harms are not mere beliefs; they arise from activities that produce significant and measurable consequences. The science behind climate change is robust and well-established. Emissions of greenhouse gases lead to rising global temperatures, resulting in cascading effects on ecosystems, human health, and societal stability. Each metric, whether it's the increased frequency

of extreme weather events, sea level rise, or agricultural decline, serves as evidence of the urgency to address these issues.

In summary, the harm we face is not localised or limited in effect. It is not like a city fire that devastates a specific area; instead, we are dealing with a hyperobject, a phenomenon that simultaneously affects everything, transcending cities and regions and continuing indefinitely through time and space. Humanity has never encountered such a threat, but this does not diminish the reality of what we face. We must collectively recognise the urgency and take decisive action to prevent catastrophic consequences for ourselves and future generations.

Given the immense scale of harm we face, it is evident that actions contributing to such destruction, the highest level of devastation, must be deemed illegal. The law exists fundamentally to prevent harm, and a functional society must actively address and halt these dangerous developments through legal frameworks.

The law is often perceived as a straightforward guide to justice, but what happens when its application confronts the unprecedented challenge of climate change? At first glance, the legal process appears simple: laws delineate which actions and intentions are illegal. In a prosecution, the charge is brought based on the claim that the defendant's actions or intentions broke the law. In serious cases in the UK, a crown court trial is held, where the court decides which legal defences can be presented to the jury. For instance, if the charge is 'criminal damage', the defence might be 'reasonable excuse'. The judge reviews the facts and evidence to determine the relevance of the defence, before the jury hears evidence from both sides and delivers a verdict.

When considering the legal implications of mass death due to climate change, this process seems straightforward: laws are written down, and evidence is presented to determine what transpired. Often, the case follows a whodunnit format; did Mrs. Peacock stab Mr. Green? However, many cases reveal a more complex reality regarding legal application.

Take, for instance, the R v Jones judgment, which will be referenced in the M25 case. This judgment dealt with the legality of causing criminal damage to military equipment intended for use in the Iraq War in 2003. The judgment frequently employed terms like 'intention', 'object', and 'means'. This raises critical questions: what did lawmakers mean by these terms? How should we interpret the object of specific phrases? The complexity of these interpretations exposes the inevitable subjectivity involved in legal application.

Tensions exist between the original intentions of lawmakers and the meanings that laws should take in contemporary contexts. The Jones judgment, for example, grapples with whether the term 'crime' should reflect the original intent of the lawmakers or be expanded to fit evolving definitions of wrongdoing. At the heart of legal interpretation lies the principle of coherence, the idea that a law should support an underlying principle. However, rigid adherence to the letter of the law can lead to outcomes that contradict the original principles the law was meant to uphold.

Consider a law forbidding discrimination based on social rank when entering public theatres. The principle of equality suggests that all individuals, regardless of status, should have access. Yet, as societal views have evolved, new groups, such as people who are black, may face exclusion based on outdated beliefs. A court could argue that 'people of any social rank' applies only to people who are white, reflecting the prejudices of the time. However, scientific evidence later demonstrates that all humans are fundamentally equal. Thus, excluding people who are black from theatres now violates the principle of equality, necessitating a broader interpretation of 'people'.

This example illustrates how strict adherence to legal wording can become incoherent when confronted with new evidence or social changes that challenge the original principles of the law. The legal system currently struggles to recognise climate change as a hyperobject, paralleling historical issues such as the fight for civil

rights. This reflects what we might call 'the shock of the new'.

After examining these legal complexities, I will broaden the perspective to consider the legal system's foundational principles. What are these principles meant to achieve, and what occurs when they are structurally undermined? When a justice system asserts that its primary concern is the welfare of its citizens, what does that mean in practice, particularly in a court of law? This will be followed by an exploration of the political implications of the mass death project.

4

THE SCALE OF HARM

When we act to prevent harm, especially the kind of harm that climate chaos and corporate greed create, we do so out of necessity. It's not just a right—it's a duty. The legal concept of 'necessity' was created for such times when regular people take extraordinary action to prevent greater harm. Just as someone might act to save lives in a fire or stop violence, we disrupt fossil fuel infrastructure to save lives from climate disasters. We're doing this to prevent undeniable, catastrophic harm, and the law has space to recognise that as in the case of saving conjoined twins through surgery - the act is needed to avoid inevitable and irreparable evil.

To qualify an action under the 'necessity' defence, we must answer two key questions: Is a clear harm occurring? And does the action aim to stop that harm? We'll start by defining what 'clear harm' means and then look at how action to prevent it can be justified.

Establishing clear harm involves a further two steps: first, defining the type of harm; second, examining specific evidence.

Consider the civil rights example of black people being banned from entering certain restaurants or theatres. The principle that all humans deserve equal rights might seem obvious today, but it wasn't always. Until relatively recently, the belief that black people were equal to white people was widely contested. I remember, as a

child, hearing my grandmother make remarks when someone black appeared on the television, suggesting that they didn't belong there, as though they were somehow lesser. She didn't say it outright, but that was the implication. It wasn't because she was a bad person - she was, in fact, generous and kind to those she saw as like herself, meaning other white people. She held the common belief of her time that black people were somehow fundamentally different. She was wrong, of course, and science eventually showed that.

Clear harm is occurring due to climate change; the science is indisputable. Those who deny it are often motivated by political or economic interests despite their 'sincerely held beliefs' (a phrase we'll return to). They are simply wrong, and this is widely recognised by 99% of the scientific community today.

Disruptive protest seeks to prevent harm and falls well within the necessity defence. We will explore how this necessity applies specifically to the motorway protest case and how this defence sheds light on broader issues within the UK's legal stance on climate-related protest.

With this in mind, we'll carefully examine what qualifies as clear harm - what should be included and what should not - using established legal precedents that support proportionate action to prevent harm.

The assumption made by the judiciary seems to be that clear harm excludes large-scale harm, as if the enormity of climate destruction somehow disqualifies it from being recognised as urgent harm. When Judge Hehir sentenced us, he remarked "The end of the world isn't relevant in a British courtroom." He dismissed science and the scale of harm as mere opinion and his denial upheld a status quo built on inequality and elite profit, dismissing the evidence as a subjective belief rather than an undeniable fact.

If we can demonstrate this large-scale harm, every argument against recognising the vastness of climate impacts as clear harm falls apart. This has major legal implications for the climate crisis. Once accepted, this argument requires the legal system to address

carbon emissions just as it eventually addressed racial discrimination.

Let's explore the continuum of small to large scale harm, starting with a man in a pub pulling out a gun. Even though no harm has yet occurred, tackling him is necessary to prevent potential death. The risk is clear and immediate—this scenario unfolds in just 15 seconds.

Now, consider conjoined twins. While they may not die in the next 15 seconds, their death is nearly certain within two weeks if they don't undergo surgery. This case, though involving a larger scale - two lives over two weeks - undoubtedly represents clear harm.

Next, imagine someone shouting "fire!" in a theatre. Now the scale involves hundreds of people. Although harm hasn't occurred yet, evacuation is vital to prevent injury or death, making the shout an act of necessity.

As we consider the Great Fire of London, the stakes rise dramatically. The entire city is at risk, impacting hundreds of thousands. The situation becomes more complex: if the fire reaches a tipping point, it spreads uncontrollably. Early intervention, such as demolishing buildings to create firebreaks, becomes crucial to prevent greater harm.

This complexity doesn't negate the existence of clear harm; each case must be assessed based on specifics, such as the fire's proximity to homes and the potential danger to life. In fact, a larger scale increases the possibility of harm and may heighten the necessity for action compared to a single fire potential.

Imagine a mechanical fault causing fires in multiple theatres across a city. If one person shouts "fire!" in response to a nearby blaze, does the presence of other fires lessen the necessity of their action? Absolutely not. The clarity of harm remains, regardless of the scale of the problem.

The same applies to a scenario where heatwaves simultaneously ignite fires in multiple cities. If fires break out in London and Bristol on the same day, arguing that the urgency to act diminishes because other fires are also burning would be absurd. The specific causes are irrelevant; the reality of fire is what matters. In fact, the

larger the scale, the greater the justification for necessary action, as the potential harm increases accordingly.

As we confront larger societal threats, it becomes essential to grasp how social and technological developments have evolved. In the past, people lived in small, scattered settlements, making the idea of a 'great fire' with exponential spread nearly impossible. While fires did occur, they were often easily extinguished and rarely endangered more than a few lives. The rise of cities, however, introduced the potential for widespread devastation.

Economic technologies follow a similar trajectory. In pre-industrial times, harm rarely spread over long periods or large areas. Today, however, this has shifted dramatically. Consider industrial pollution: a factory may release chemicals into a river, with a risk of causing crop diseases and cancers among downstream farmers. Even if there's a theoretical chance that the pollution may not cause harm in this case, the evidence indicates that it can inflict such damage. Thus, it qualifies as clear harm based on evidence rather than mere preconception.

Consider asbestos as an example. It can harm people decades after exposure, and this reality is indisputable. No judge or official can deny the dangers posed by asbestos.

Another example is radiation from nuclear events. The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 is a clear case: harm extended across vast areas and lasted decades. The fallout from Chernobyl affected communities as far away as the Welsh hills. While the degree of harm may be debated, the reality remains unchanged simply because the effects unfold over time and distance.

In both instances, the spatial and temporal distribution of harm does not alter the fundamental question: is clear harm occurring? The answer is yes. As the scale of harm expands, so do questions of causation and intent, which our legal systems routinely address.

Indirect harm, such as that caused by pollution, introduces significant complexity into our understanding of causation. A

factory owner might knowingly pollute for profit or turn a blind eye to the associated risks. Yet the critical question remains: is harm occurring? The evidence is clear when we see significantly higher cancer rates in communities near pollution sources. Larger scales of pollution complicate the tracing of causation, but this complexity doesn't negate the reality of harm. We can use established, evidence-based methods to demonstrate these causal links.

As we examine this continuum, it becomes evident that clear harm occurs regardless of scale. There is no arbitrary threshold beyond which harm could be deemed 'too large' to be relevant in a courtroom.

The key takeaway is that we cannot back down on our arguments about clear harm because the harm is on a large scale. Dismissing the possibility of clear harm based solely on scale leads us to arbitrary reasoning. Our approach should be guided by evidence and rationality, not dogma or unfounded cut-offs.

I emphasise this point because it underpins our entire argument. Once we acknowledge that large-scale events can cause clear harm, we can move forward with clarity and purpose, particularly in the context of climate activism and its legal challenges.

5

URGENCY AND PROBABILITY

Now let's shift from the concept of scale to the urgency and likelihood of harm. The core principle remains: necessity demands urgency. If harm isn't imminent or hasn't yet materialised, there's no reasonable basis to inflict harm to prevent it. Without urgency, alternative options - calling for help, involving authorities - are available. In classic legal cases, immediate action is necessary to prevent disaster: stopping a man about to fire a gun, performing urgent surgery on conjoined twins, or raising the alarm in a theatre fire.

Yet some distinctions deserve clarification. For preventive action to be justified, harm doesn't have to happen this very instant. For instance, when separating conjoined twins, intervention might not be required immediately, but it's essential within days to prevent certain death. Here, the key factor is probability; if there were any chance of survival without surgery, the urgency would lessen.

In larger-scale scenarios, assessing future risks becomes more complex. While the size of the threat doesn't cancel out harm, it often stretches across vast regions and timelines. With the Great Fire of London, fires were already raging and action was urgent due to the high probability of further spread. Had the flames been contained, people could have escaped safely. But with fires at risk

of spiralling out of control, swift action was essential. The decision to demolish buildings wasn't based on certainty, it was based on the intolerable risk of inaction that would endanger thousands.

The term 'inevitable' can be misleading, as no outcome is ever fully guaranteed. A surgeon might make a mistake, a gun could jam, someone might suddenly change their mind. So, the issue isn't strict inevitability but rather the severity and likelihood of harm. In life-or-death scenarios, with an armed gunman for example, the probability of harm must be high - near certainty.

In less clear-cut cases, absolute certainty isn't necessary. Take a fire in a theatre: even a moderate chance of it spreading demands immediate action because the stakes are so high. A contained blaze can quickly escalate to a life-threatening emergency. Similarly, during the Great Fire of London, officials couldn't be sure demolishing buildings would stop the blaze, but the risk of harm from inaction was very high. The potential impact on thousands justified drastic measures.

This follows the precautionary principle: weighing the severity of harm - lives lost, injuries suffered - against its probability. This principle applies to risks involving life and death rather than minor injuries or property damage. In fires, for example, even a lower certainty threshold justifies action due to the severe potential for loss of life. This reasoning is directly relevant to climate activism and peace activism, where stakes are vast, lives are at risk, and timelines are long.

No court would argue, "The fire might not have spread into the theatre, so your disruption was unreasonable". On the contrary, those who take preventive action are often praised for their bravery. In *R v Jones*, the court considered whether activists could use the defence of necessity to justify their disruptive actions. In this case, peace activists entered a military site to protest against the Iraq War, arguing that their actions were intended to prevent the far greater destruction the war would cause. The court recognised that, under certain circumstances, such actions might be necessary

to prevent imminent danger, even if they were technically unlawful.

This case set a precedent: courts can acknowledge that some actions, though disruptive or unlawful, may be justified if they aim to prevent severe, likely harm. For climate activism, *R v Jones* provides a potential defence, showing that disruptive acts to avoid foreseeable catastrophe - like climate collapse - can be both necessary and justifiable under specific conditions. This stance counters the idea that action is unreasonable just because predicted harm isn't guaranteed.

The precautionary principle is clear; both the probability and severity of harm must be weighed, and this must be based on evidence rather than presumption. The difficulty is in deciding how much harm from the preventive action is justified.

With future events, there's a risk of reaching a tipping point - a critical moment when inaction could lead to irreversible consequences. With fires, for instance, once they hit a certain threshold, they can spiral out of control. You may not know precisely when that tipping point will come, but waiting until you do would almost certainly be too late.

In complex systems like society, some harms might seem minor or less immediate but are difficult to measure and can trigger tipping points with far-reaching consequences. The question then becomes: *How severe is the harm if this tipping point is reached?* In a theatre, it could mean dozens of lives lost; on a citywide scale, it's a national crisis; for the planet, a crisis for all humanity. As a climate scientist once told me, "You just don't want to go there". Exposing society to that level of risk is irrational and deeply immoral.

Before we apply this reasoning to the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, we must address a frequent argument in climate trials: that these matters are inherently political and thus beyond the court's purview. However, as we've established our core principles, this objection becomes less formidable and can be effectively countered. Let's proceed step-by-step.

First, let's revisit our four main examples: the gun, the twins,

the theatre fire, and the city fire. Each scenario presents a case of clear harm, fundamentally involving physical injury or loss of life. This physicality aligns with the objectivity that forms a practical foundation within the UK's legal framework and in many other jurisdictions. While philosophers may debate the nature of physical harm, it remains an operational principle in law.

In court, you cannot simply assert, "Well, yes, you claim the man is dead, but that's just an opinion". Physical facts are immutable—independent of opinion and subject to clear observational evidence. Courtrooms rely on this factual basis, where reality supersedes subjective beliefs.

Consider the legal defence of 'consent', which I have employed in recent trials. Suppose someone kills a dog, believing they are sparing it from suffering. The argument is that the individual believed the dog's owner, if fully informed, would consent to the act. In my own case, I successfully argued for a consent defence after throwing paint on Greenpeace's offices to highlight their blind spots regarding the most critical climate outcomes. I emphasised that 'the circumstances' must be objectively established. With the dog, it is an objective fact how much it was critically injured or whether it was merely scratched. The owner's potential consent hinges on these concrete circumstances, and that distinction is essential. In my case, I was supported in court by a Greenpeace spokesperson who acknowledged that the group was not prioritising critical climate risks and thus consented to the paint-throwing as a reasonable action to alert the organisation.

If the person killing the dog genuinely believed it was mortally injured, a jury would determine whether they acted in error or with justification. Importantly, the dog's physical condition - the 'circumstances' - is objectively ascertainable. Lord Hoffman, a respected British judge renowned for tackling complex legal and ethical issues, affirmed this in *R v Jones*; once objective harm is established, we can critically evaluate its justifications, whether political, economic, or moral.

Consider economic justifications. Imagine a factory polluting a river, leading to increased cancer rates among residents downstream. Suppose we have irrefutable evidence linking pollution to these health impacts. The harm is clear, factual, and measurable. The factory owners may argue that their operations serve a public good that outweighs the harm caused. However, this argument does not automatically justify the harm; it is contingent upon robust evidence and scrutiny.

There exists a spectrum of justification. On one end, a factory producing essential wartime supplies may cause limited harm; on the other, a factory generating everyday goods could lead to widespread cancer and numerous fatalities. The line we draw between justifiable and unjustifiable harm depends on prevailing laws and societal standards, yet the existence of this continuum is indisputable.

Based on the facts, we must evaluate whether the benefits genuinely outweigh the harm. This understanding is especially critical when the harm is as clear and severe as pollution-induced illness.

Ultimately, the courtroom should recognise that political action is a reasonable response to undeniable harms, especially in the context of climate collapse. Just as we would not dismiss a call to action in the face of a gunman or a raging fire, we must acknowledge the validity of political arguments that seek to prevent catastrophic emissions, ecosystem destruction and public health crises. Such actions should not be relegated to the realm of politics alone; they are deeply intertwined with the pursuit of justice and the protection of lives.

The notion of clear harm can be examined through economic, political, and religious perspectives, each forming a continuum. In politics, disagreements about what constitutes a good society often arise; for example, a socialist may argue that a conservative's views cause them harm. However, in a liberal democracy, such disagreements are protected under free speech and are not criminal.

At the midpoint of this continuum is hate speech, where aggressive expressions can lead to legal repercussions. Hate speech

profoundly impacts the wellbeing of its targets, escalating from mere disagreement to attacks on their beliefs. Additionally, it can incite others to commit physical harm. While grey areas exist, the closer one moves to incitement, the more likely clear harm is evident, increasing the potential for legal consequences.

Further along the continuum lies physical violence - acts like assault or property damage driven by political motives. A notable instance occurred during the UK riots in 2024, when extreme right-wing individuals targeted migrant hostels. Here, the law is clear: those causing physical harm face prosecution and likely imprisonment. While everyone can hold opinions, they cannot inflict harm on others; political beliefs do not justify harming others.

Debates about the boundaries between free expression and illegal action are inevitable. While some may argue for radical freedom or a particular point of view, the legal system in a liberal democracy seeks balance through evidence. For the purposes of this book, I will accept this framework.

Politics can then be seen as the nonviolent resolution of conflicts within society. Regardless of beliefs, using violence to advance an agenda is unacceptable.

Some actions threaten the very fabric of society and thus invite legal scrutiny when they breach social consensus. This principle applies not only to political and economic beliefs but also to religious faith. People can express their beliefs freely, provided they do not undermine society or violate the rights of others. The consensus is that religious beliefs cannot justify actions like murder. The key question remains: Has clear harm occurred? This relies on objective evidence, did lives end, and were they taken by the accused?

Let's examine necessary actions taken to mitigate clear harm resulting from human beliefs. We have already established criteria for identifying clear harm arising from natural occurrences or mistakes, which depend on physical evidence. When harm stems from human beliefs, the motivation behind that harm is irrelevant

to its existence. For example, a terrorist's beliefs do not change the classification of their act as murder.

The critical point is this: whether the clear harm originates from nature or human beliefs does not affect the legitimacy of actions taken to prevent it.

Consider the Great Fire of London. The fire, whether caused by natural means or human error, presented a real threat of mass death, making it entirely reasonable to attempt to extinguish it. Now, suppose the fire had been deliberately set by arsonists motivated by religious beliefs, intending to incite social chaos and overthrow the government. Even in this scenario, the fire would still pose a significant threat, and the justification for attempting to stop it would remain unchanged. If people successfully contained the fire by demolishing buildings, they would be hailed as heroes. The subsequent discovery that religious extremists started the fire would not diminish their heroism; no one would pursue legal action against them based solely on the motive behind the fire.

We must apply this same reasoning to those who undertake acts of necessity to halt clear harm. Returning to the Great Fire of London, imagine that prior to the blaze, a group of campaigners had voiced concerns over fire hazards posed by closely built wooden structures. They believed that the city government should regulate housing construction, while builders advocated for their right to develop freely. When the fire broke out, if these campaigners were the first to act - demolishing homes to halt its spread - the same principle holds: in court, their beliefs would be irrelevant. The inquiry would focus on physical facts: Was there a fire? Was it spreading? Were the campaigners acting to stop it? If so, their actions could be justified on the grounds of necessity. However, if they had destroyed property unrelated to stopping the fire, that would constitute a crime. But tearing down buildings to prevent the spread of the blaze would not. Their feelings about the cause of the fire would not matter; it all comes down to the facts.

Herein lies a crucial distinction between 'protest' and 'acts of

necessity'. A central theme of this book is to clarify this confusion. Protest is inherently part of the political process; individuals demonstrating to advocate a perspective others may oppose. These views reflect varying economic interests or subjective beliefs about societal organisation. In legal terms, such beliefs do not justify acts that cause harm, whether through public disruption or violence. However, when clear harm is present, the logic of necessity applies; disruptive actions may be warranted to prevent significant harm - sometimes referred to as "inevitable and irreparable evil". In such circumstances, the beliefs of those causing the harm or those attempting to avert it become irrelevant.

In other words, what might be perceived as an act of protest can also be an act of necessity. This is not logically contradictory. For a court, the issue is not whether the actions constitute protest, but whether they are justified as acts of necessity. But what situation can, in principle, justify an act of necessity? Specifically, what acts of necessity can be justified that cause a small amount of harm but seek to prevent 'clear harm'? 'Clear harm' means objective physical harm to human beings. The greater the potential harm, the lower the probability threshold that is required to justify an act of necessity. This leads us to consider probability. The baseline is the case of conjoined twins, where failing to act would have resulted in 'inevitable and irreplicable evil', the death of both infants. This aligns with the law of duress, which permits someone to act to prevent imminent death (R v Thacker 2021, section 90). However, this principle does not necessarily apply to large-scale deaths over extended timeframes, such as in the Great Fire of London. Here, the precautionary principle should be invoked, weighing the probability of harm against its scale and severity. For example, no one would be prosecuted for breaking down a door to prevent a nuclear disaster, even with only a 10% chance of it happening.

Additionally, we have established that the motives or beliefs of those causing clear harm, as well as of those engaging in acts of necessity, are irrelevant. What matters is the objective physical

harm and the physical consequences of the alleged act of necessity. These are matters of fact. This principle was reinforced in *R v Jones*, as referenced by the judge in the Whole Truth Five case. In section 73, the judge, Lord Hoffman, states:

> *...the question remains as to whether in such circumstances his use of force was reasonable. And this is an objective question... The 1967 Act does not excuse a defendant if he uses such force as he himself thinks to be reasonable. It must actually be reasonable.*

In other words, one cannot shout "fire!" in a theatre simply because one believes it is reasonable to do so; it is only justifiable if an actual fire is spreading. This is an objective matter.

We will now compare the objective characteristics of greenhouse gas emissions with the criteria for clear harm to determine whether they could, in principle, justify acts of necessity to stop or mitigate them.

6

THE CASE OF CARBON EMISSIONS

Just as we would assess the nature of a theatre fire or a city blaze, we need to outline the general characteristics of the physical consequences of emitting greenhouse gases:

- Rising temperatures inflict severe harm, destroying lives and livelihoods on a global scale.
- This harm is effectively irreversible; its destructiveness is not a one-off event but persists for hundreds of thousands of years.
- Continued emissions risk triggering geophysical and biological tipping points, leading to even greater harm.
- If these tipping points are reached, there is a significant risk that civilisation could be destroyed, potentially risking human extinction.
- Crucially, it will be too late to prevent the ensuing damage once these tipping points are crossed.

Let's examine the question of scale. We've established that scale is not a barrier to classifying an action as a clear harm; in fact, the larger the harm, the stronger the justification for acts of necessity to prevent it. As objective physical harm increases, so does the necessity to act. It's akin to breaking down a door—causing damage—to prevent a nuclear power plant accident. Although

such situations are rare, they cannot be dismissed simply because they have never occurred before. Human history is ongoing.

As Lord Hoffman reminds us, the consequences of harmful actions - whether they span months, years, or centuries - do not diminish the necessity to act; rather, they amplify it.

If greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced by 50% within the next six years (by 2030), average global temperatures will exceed 2°C, displacing an estimated one billion people. That's twenty times the number of homeless at the end of World War II, amounting to one in eight people on Earth. There's a 50% chance the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) will collapse by 2050, causing temperatures in Europe to drop by 10–30°C. The Arctic is expected to be ice-free in summer between 2030 and 2035, and by 2040 forest fires may destroy 20% of woodland annually.

This is just the beginning. We could list numerous potential disasters and assign probabilities, demonstrating that failing to reduce emissions soon will lock in catastrophic harms. While the exact probabilities may be debated, no reasonable person can deny the gravity of what's at stake - as Lord Hoffman required, this is an 'objective question'.

In climate legal cases, we can identify two types of probabilities. First, we have clear, scientifically-backed probabilities regarding the direct effects of continued greenhouse gas emissions - a 50% chance of increased drought here, a 25% increased chance of hurricanes there. Secondly, we must confront the likelihood of the collapse of civilisation and even of human extinction. According to Professor William J. Ripple, 3-6 billion lives will be massively affected by climate breakdown with one peer-reviewed paper explicitly stating that "the rich will be responsible for the killing of 1 billion poorer people" through carbon emissions by the end of the century.

Imagine a scenario where the global population could plummet to one billion by 2100, eventually leading to complete extinction over the following one to two centuries. Irreversible tipping

points triggered by climate collapse, could create feedback loops that push global temperatures beyond 5–6°C, rendering human extinction virtually inevitable. Even if we had the technology to avert this outcome, societal collapse would prevent its deployment at the necessary scale.

It is both sobering and essential to evaluate the probability of human extinction and its implications for the right to act out of necessity. Modern technology carries a non-zero possibility of leading to human extinction. While we cannot halt technological progress in response to every theoretical risk, we must ask: at what point does the prospect of extinction gain legal significance? When does it constitute what we might call 'infinite clear harm' - the death of all humanity?

This question is not one to be easily dismissed. During my trial, where I invoked the consent defence, I highlighted the prospect of extinction as part of the objective circumstances that property owners should weigh when considering whether they would consent to my actions. The judge excluded this matter from consideration, but, as Lord Hoffman reminds us, extinction is an 'objective question' that demands our attention.

We must determine whether the prospect of human extinction is real and, if so, what the probability is. There's no fundamental difference between a mass death event and extinction; extinction simply marks the point when a species vanishes entirely. This has happened countless times throughout Earth's history, so it's prudent to consider it now. We are witnessing the Sixth Great Extinction, and it would be sheer hubris to think we're immune. Some scientists are even calling it the Great Extermination, given humanity's role in destroying life, including our own.

If global temperatures rise above 2°C, there is at least a 10% chance of exceeding 5°C by around 2100—a temperature threshold that effectively locks in human extinction. This is not a thought game anymore. It's our reality.

Given that, we must also consider the timeframe for harm. Legal

convention often suggests that harm must be occurring now for the right of necessity to apply. The law on duress requires the threat of 'imminent death', implying a close nexus between the harm and the action taken to prevent it. However, as we've established, this nexus cannot be rigid. In the case of the conjoined twins, the inevitability of death was clear, even if it wasn't immediate, and the same reasoning applies to long-term but certain events like climate collapse.

If this were to happen, it could occur within weeks or months. The crucial point is that the prospect of great harm or evil is 'inevitable and irreplicable'. The right of necessity exists to try to separate the twins, even if the moment of death is anticipated in the future. In the case of a city fire, it may not be immediately clear when specific deaths will occur. Yet, what matters is that mass death is highly likely, providing sufficient justification for action.

Waiting for the precise moment when the imminent death of specific individuals is certain, means that action probably cannot be taken in time to save them. The spreading fire may be too close, and demolishing enough houses to create effective firebreaks may take too long. This illustrates a scenario where the core moral reasoning justifying an act of necessity - to save lives that can be saved - does not neatly align with the conventional legal limits. While the majority of necessity cases rightly demand a close proximity between harm and the actions taken to prevent it, as seen in the city fire case, the underlying principle should allow for an extended timeframe concerning the imminence of mortal harm.

When it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, multiple 'fires' - or causes of death from climate impacts - occur all the time. Heat-related deaths are increasing, water shortages are provoking wars, etc. It is irrational to claim that we cannot invoke a right of necessity to extinguish one fire simply because others are burning elsewhere. The crucial point is that clear, objective harm is happening and that justifies action to prevent it.

Moreover, there's a compounding factor: if we do not extinguish

these fires, we risk triggering a global catastrophe at any moment due to tipping points. While we cannot pinpoint exactly when these tipping points will occur, we know they are likely to happen soon - specifically, between a 1°C and 2°C increase in global temperature. As of 2024, we have already reached 1.5°C. The uncertainty around these thresholds is outweighed by the looming threat of death for hundreds of millions.

Thus, the urgency of our situation is threefold. First, deaths are already happening, not just from isolated incidents but across multiple global climate 'fires'. Second, we face an immediate need for action to avert the potential triggering of tipping points that could lead to mass fatalities. Finally, these tipping points significantly increase the probability of human extinction by 2100.

Consider the analogy of a city fire: the justification for demolishing a building goes beyond saving lives in the next half hour. It's about preventing the fire from spiralling out of control and causing mass fatalities in the hours or days to come. The clear harm principle must extend to preventing greater harm over longer periods and larger areas. In the case of emissions, this harm is not confined; it affects the entire planet.

We begin to recognise the nature of a hyperobject threatening human life. This is not a vague future threat; it is already killing and will continue to do so on an increasing scale. 8 million a year die from air pollution, hundreds of thousands from temperature change. It impacts everything and everyone. Imagine an alien invasion where a disease infects the atmosphere, initially killing a few but eventually reaching a tipping point that wipes out billions. At that point, everyone would have a clear right of necessity to stop the disease, and even a seemingly unlikely plan to combat it would be justified by the urgent need to prevent universal death.

This logic also applies to the example of breaking into a nuclear power station to prevent an accidental disaster. Criminal damage may be justified when the harm at stake is both immediate and massive. Even if the chances of averting disaster are slim, no

reasonable authority would pursue charges, as the justification would be overwhelmingly clear.

Harm evolves over time. Large-scale threats do not emerge out of nowhere; they develop from speculative to serious, then to imminent, and finally to catastrophic. Carbon emissions have followed this trajectory. When NASA scientist James Hansen first presented the threat to the United Nations in 1989, it was real, but there was time to adapt. By 2000, it became a global issue demanding urgent action. By 2010, it was the world's top emergency, with threats of irreversibility. Now, in 2024, mass death is locked in, and human extinction is a real possibility. In Hansen's latest paper *Global Warming in the Pipeline*, he even acknowledged the risk now of 10°C warming. Once we acknowledge that tipping points are certain, it will be too late to act. The harm is massive, imminent, and potentially extinction-level.

At what point does the right of necessity become justified? Given the severity of the current situation, it's difficult to conceive of a worse scenario. The case for recognising this right as a legal defence is clear, and a jury should be able to assess the specific circumstances of each case.

Despite all this, in my recent trial, the judge rejected the application of the right of necessity. We had outlined a two-stage process: first, establishing that carbon emissions warrant a necessity defence; second, presenting case-specific evidence for jury consideration. However, Judge Hehir ruled out the possibility of a necessity defence or related justifications, silencing any courtroom discussion on the matter. He decided the case before the trial, allowing only 30 minutes for my lawyer's argument and interrupting me repeatedly during my 10-minute speaking time. This created a closed loop: the judge ruled there was no case, refused to hear arguments, and concluded that there was nothing to hear.

Consequently, the jury only heard evidence of the nuisance we were charged with, devoid of context about the necessity of

our actions. Unsurprisingly, they found us guilty. The judge's instructions to the jury dismissed the entire issue in two sentences, declaring climate change and our beliefs about it "entirely irrelevant" to the charges. He repeated this throughout the trial, often in a tone resembling dogma rather than engaging with the argument.

The judge's stance appeared to regard climate change as a subjective belief, which is a fundamental error. There's a critical distinction between the political debate surrounding climate change and the objective reality of carbon emissions causing harm. Greenhouse gas emissions are a physical reality, not a matter of belief, and should be treated as such in law. Denying this politicises the legal system. Even amid political debate, significant harm constitutes a crime under the law.

The judge's dismissal of our case due to a perceived lack of a direct link between harm and necessity was flawed. Clear harm need not be immediate or temporally and spatially connected, as illustrated by legal precedents like the conjoined twins case or the city fire analogy. Just because carbon emissions don't cause harm in the same direct manner as other acts doesn't negate the reality or immediacy of that harm.

Ultimately, the judge's decision stemmed from dogma rather than sound legal reasoning. Comprehensive legal arguments regarding the right of necessity in relation to greenhouse gases do exist. While no specific law defines this right, it is based on precedents from earlier cases. As we've seen in cases like the conjoined twins, this logic can be extended to the current emergency of carbon emissions. These arguments alone provide sufficient grounds for allowing the defence to proceed to a jury.

7

LAWFUL EXCUSE

Several laws passed by the British Parliament establish a broader 'lawful excuse' for causing harm to prevent greater harm, aligning with the core rationale of the right of necessity. While I won't explore all relevant laws, it's useful to focus on two significant ones cited by Lord Hoffman in the 2006 R v Jones judgment, regarded as a lode star for assessing protest cases.

The first is Section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967, which states that "a person may use reasonable force in the prevention of crime or in effecting or assisting the arrest of offenders or persons unlawfully at large". The second is Section 1(1) of the Criminal Damage Act 1971, which states "A person who, without lawful excuse, destroys or damages any property belonging to another, intending to destroy or damage it, shall be guilty of an offence." Section 5 defines "lawful excuse", indicating that a person may damage or destroy property to protect their own or another's interest if (i) that property is in immediate need of protection and (ii) the means of protection are reasonable given the circumstances.

In the R v Jones judgment, the judge considered the criminal damage of military equipment intended for the impending Iraq War of 2003, which the defendants believed was illegal. They argued that protecting Iraqi property justified damaging UK

government property. Much of the written judgement focuses on whether these laws apply solely within the UK, which would determine their relevance. A similar argument indicates that international laws regarding wars of aggression do not apply to the UK, leading to the rejection of the appeal. Hoffman contends these matters should be pursued through legal and political processes within a "functioning democracy".

A key observation is the relationship between the law's literal wording and its judicial interpretation. Judges seem to adopt a 'have your cake and eat it' approach. A literal reading of the 1967 Act suggests that a person may use reasonable force to prevent 'crime', without specifying the type of crime. This could imply any crime or any action perceived as criminal. However, judges argue this must be understood in the law's original context, which aimed to encompass both felony and misdemeanour, suggesting 'crime' refers only to those occurring within the UK. Given that the appeal concerns stopping crimes outside the UK, the law is deemed inapplicable.

This judgement is not necessarily incorrect, but its reasoning lacks robustness. If the law's framers intended to limit its applicability to UK crimes, why not specify 'British' before 'crime'?

With regard to how these laws apply to carbon emissions in the UK, there is conclusive evidence that these emissions cause extensive physical damage to life and property globally, and therefore within the UK. Thus, these laws could potentially apply to such emissions. Critics might argue these laws were intended for small-scale criminal contexts, akin to a man intending to fire a gun. However, a close reading does not exclude larger-scale scenarios. The judgments in R v Jones suggest exceptions exist to the conventional interpretation of what the law means or intends. For example, the judgment states people are "normally" expected to call the police if a crime occurs (Section 78), implying exceptions exist. It notes there is "seldom, if ever" a legal basis for civil disobedience, yet this does not rule out the possibility entirely

(Section 93). Judges express "deepest suspicion" regarding the legality of civil disobedience, but again, this does not make it illegal.

Ultimately, Lord Hoffman is willing to consider "for the sake of argument" that civil disobedience could involve "the use of force for the purposes of Section 3 of the 1967 Act", consistently accepting the principle that it could be legal.

A careful examination of the two laws reveals that their wording does not prohibit civil disobedience. The term 'crime' in the 1967 Act is not limited; it does not specify a timeframe or location. The greater the crime, the more applicable the law becomes. The 1971 Act clarifies that individuals can protect property in which they have a right or interest, or in which another has an interest. This principle is evident in the Great Fire of London case, where the law protects individuals who pull down properties to safeguard others' property within the broader community. There is no provision in this law limiting the scale of action to protect property; the greater the protection afforded to more properties, the stronger the 'lawful excuse'.

The phrase "having regard to all the circumstances" indicates no limit on relevant evidence regarding time and space. We should not only consider a fire within a few metres of a demolished house; we must assess the risk posed by the entire fire getting out of control at that moment. The number of houses in London at risk if the fire spreads is crucial. While factors outside this immediate context, such as houses burning in Bristol, may not be directly relevant, the key issue is causality - "all the circumstances" no more, no less.

Regarding the need to protect property "in immediate need of protection", this includes not only houses currently burning but also those that will "inevitably" be consumed if action is not taken (to reference the conjoined twin case). Here, "immediate" does not imply action must halt destruction at this very moment; it signifies that if action is not taken, property will inevitably be damaged or destroyed in the near future.

In the context of a hyperobject, we must clarify the underlying

principles. "All circumstances" here pertain to the entire world and all future time. If an alien force threatens to destroy all property indefinitely, then any action taken to halt it is lawful, provided it is effective. Such actions have the most reasonable excuse, as they protect vast amounts of property (and lives) globally, with the protection extending indefinitely into the future.

From a rational, common-sense perspective, the enormity of the destruction and death caused by carbon emissions outweighs any concerns about the novelty of the circumstances. The law is unconcerned with novelty but with cause and effect. Whether murder is committed using gunpowder, a bomb, gas, or a nuclear weapon, the fact that it is new is irrelevant. We must stick to the primary question: is clear illegal harm being caused, and if so, is there a legal justification to stop it?

The key takeaway is this: cases regarding carbon emissions fundamentally differ from protest cases, where actions are taken against specific alleged wrongs situated in time and space. For instance, in the R v Jones appeal, the action was a protest about the Iraq War. In a subsequent case referencing the Jones judgment, there was an appeal that concerned actions taken to prevent the deportation of migrants. In both instances, and in most protest cases, the harm addressed is political with opposing views on either side. In contrast, the harm caused by carbon emissions transcends time and space; it is universally detrimental.

The threat of total global destruction violates everyone's rights and interests. It is not in anyone's economic, political, or religious interest to see the world obliterated. The horror of losing everything we cherish, witnessing our children die, or having no prospect for human life in the next generation is unimaginable.

8

THE LEGALITY OF THE RIGHT OF NECESSITY TO PREVENT CLEAR HARM

Next, we must consider the legality of actions taken to prevent harm. I will first outline the general criteria before examining the specific court case in which I was a defendant.

The criteria for such actions are established in the judgement on conjoined twins. Firstly, the harm prevented must create "inevitable and irreplicable evil". We've discussed this criterion already, but we must also consider the criteria for the actions taken to stop that harm. In *In re A (Children) (Conjoined Twins: Surgical Separation)* [2001] Fam 147, Brooke stated:

> *No more should be done than is reasonably necessary to achieve the intended purpose. The harm inflicted must not be disproportionate to the harm avoided.*

These criteria imply that the action must have some objective chance of stopping the harm. For example, if a man in a pub pulls out a gun, and another man knocks over a third person, the latter's action cannot be deemed an act of necessity, as it does not prevent the shooting. Similarly, if individuals demolish unrelated houses instead of stopping a fire, they are not acting out of necessity; if they target a house they dislike, their actions are criminal.

After addressing these issues, we arrive at two key criteria:

1. Individuals stopping harm cannot inflict more harm than necessary.
2. The harm created must be less than the harm avoided.

The notion of 'reasonable' force applies here. Harm inflicted cannot exceed that which is to be prevented and should ideally be significantly less. For example, if the harm to be stopped is quantified as 10 units, the maximum harm that can be inflicted should be 5 units.

We can establish the following calculations:

- Harm to be stopped: 10 units » Maximum harm: 5 units
- Harm to be stopped: 20 units » Maximum harm: 10 units
- Harm to be stopped: 30 units » Maximum harm: 15 units

Thus, the greater the harm to be prevented, the more harm can justifiably be inflicted.

Before examining my court case, we must establish that the means of action to stop harm must be based on objective effectiveness. Effectiveness is the key criterion. Action cannot be limited to physical force alone. In the case of the gunman and the conjoined twins, a clear cause-and-effect relationship exists, but this is not the only valid form of necessity, as demonstrated in cases involving theatres and city fires.

In the theatre scenario, the mechanism of harm arises from disruptive communication. Pulling people out one by one is less effective than shouting to alert everyone to the life-threatening situation. Therefore, the effectiveness of any disruptive action aimed at preventing clear harm cannot be dismissed without considering the evidence.

If harm is occurring, individuals have a right of necessity to intervene. It would be irrational to exclude the use of arms versus legs in preventing harm, as both can be effective. An obvious objection might be that if both arms and legs can stop harm, why should both not be used? Actions involving both are legitimate as long as they are effective. Similarly, using one's voice - an important

social mechanism - should not be disregarded, as it may also prevent harm. The key criterion here is effectiveness. Once accepted, this allows for a rational exploration of various mechanisms to stop harm without irrational prejudgments.

In more complex social situations, we must acknowledge that multiple causal mechanisms can contribute to effective action. There need not be a single causal chain, as illustrated by the gunman and the conjoined twins scenario. For example, shouting in a theatre may yield several outcomes: people may hear about the threat and begin to evacuate, someone may call the fire service, or others may attempt to slow the fire's spread.

In the case of a city fire, demolishing certain buildings may directly prevent the fire from spreading and encourage onlookers to assist or coordinate efforts to stop the fire in other areas. When clear harm exists over time and space, various actions can be taken to stop it. The rational criteria are: (i) is clear harm occurring, and (ii) are the total effects of the actions taken to stop that harm sufficiently effective relative to the harm being done?

In climate-related cases, the prosecution is given ample time to detail and analyse all harm caused by the alleged right of necessity actions over extended time and space. They outline immediate effects, subsequent harms, and speculate on potential harms that could have occurred. Therefore, it is only fair that the same thoroughness applies when assessing the means by which the right of necessity did or could have stopped the clear harm it aimed to prevent. It is against natural justice principles to present all evidence from the prosecution without affording the same opportunity to the defence.

This brings us to the Whole Truth Five court case. As is typical, the prosecution presented a detailed account of the effects of individuals climbing onto gantries over the M25. They outlined various financial costs, including disruptions to the public and police, and the impact on individuals delayed from attending hospital appointments, funerals, and other obligations.

Additionally, evidence speculating on potential outcomes from the actions was deemed legitimate. For instance, the actions could have resulted in serious or fatal accidents, and if planned disruptions had occurred, they might have caused gridlock and significant economic disruption. The judge even included the possibility of "social breakdown". No potential outcome was ruled out simply because it was hypothetical.

Throughout this section, I've adopted a similar approach to assess the clear harm caused by the emission of greenhouse gases. Like the prosecution in our case, we cannot impose arbitrary limits on the scope of harm. The judge did not restrict the description of harm from blocking motorways to a subjective timeframe, such as one day. The prosecution had the right - and obligation - to present a comprehensive account of all harm to ensure the full truth was revealed.

Using the same method as the prosecution, we have established that significant harm is currently occurring and will continue if carbon emissions persist. The two key questions that remain are whether our actions were (i) effective and (ii) proportionate.

(i) Regarding effectiveness, peacefully blocking a motorway has been proved to prevent substantial societal harm. As a researcher at King's College London on this subject, I can provide numerous case studies showing that this action is arguably the most effective nonviolent method for exerting social pressure in Western societies today. For instance, the fuel protests of 2005 compelled Prime Minister Blair to change policies, while recent road blockades by farmers in the UK and EU successfully halted environmental measures. Notably, in Serbia, blocking motorways recently stopped the sale of dangerous mineral mining rights to the global corporation, Rio Tinto.

These examples do not pass judgment on whether such actions are right or wrong; rather, they demonstrate that motorway blockades create effective pressure for social and economic change. In the Whole Truth Five case actions, demonstrators called for an

end to new oil and gas drilling licenses, supported by compelling evidence that further fossil fuel extraction would contribute to exceeding a 2°C rise in average global temperatures.

Assuming these actions sought to prevent further carbon emissions effectively, we can now examine proportionality. It's important to note that the organisation of these actions was based on nonviolent principles. All participants underwent psychological and physical assessments and received mandatory training to adhere to protocols, which included remaining nonviolent, avoiding aggression, and allowing access for emergency vehicles.

While these actions did cause public inconvenience, precautions were taken to minimise harm, and this was noted by the prosecution.

(ii) So, was the action proportionate? To explore this, consider a hypothetical scenario I presented during the trial: if there were a credible risk of a terrorist attack several miles up the motorway, and a group had convincing evidence and the means to stop traffic by climbing onto gantries, one could argue that their actions were proportionate. In a subsequent court case, the prosecution might outline the harm caused by delays while the defence details the harms they sought to prevent, such as loss of life, trauma from witnessing an explosion, and the economic costs of closing the motorway.

For example, if there was a significant risk of 10 fatalities and climbing onto the bridge directly stopped traffic for several hours, the case might not even go to court; those who climbed the gantries could be seen as national heroes. In this context, the right of necessity would need to create significantly more harm for proportionality to warrant a legal case. If individuals resorted to explosives to stop traffic, opinions might vary, but there would probably be a national consensus that preventing vehicles from proceeding was a proportionate action to save lives.

This scenario is easier to grasp cognitively because it presents two concrete actions: the terrorist plan and the act of stopping traffic. Both are tangible and imaginable, as we have seen similar events unfold in real life. This may explain the mocking from the judge

when he questioned how blocking the motorway could possibly stop climate change, insisting there was no physical connection and thus no valid defence. Setting aside his apparent refusal to acknowledge the significant objective physical harm caused by carbon emissions at current levels, there seems to be a broader cognitive confusion surrounding the nature of a hyperobject that inflicts harm across both time and space.

There are only two possible objections. The first is scepticism about the reality of the threat. You might doubt the evidence presented in the first part of this book - along with the 10,000 peer-reviewed studies it draws on. Fair enough. But as Lord Hoffmann famously said, this is "a question of objectivity". Reality does not bend to denial. If the threat is real, it's real.

After we accept the science, the second objection asks whether motorway blockades are effective. Here, we flip the question: when faced with serious harm, isn't *any* action with a chance of success justified? In formal terms, if the threat is large, even a small chance of prevention outweighs inaction. The principle is clear: the greater the risk, the more justified any reasonable attempt becomes.

In this case, closing motorways to force the public to confront the climate crisis has some chance of success. Similar actions in Serbia against Rio Tinto mining have demonstrated measurable, if limited, impact. Consider the direct outcomes in the UK: the publicity increased pressure on policymakers to take action against oil and gas, which contributed to the Labour Party pledging no new oil licenses in the North Sea and winning the 2024 general election. Indirectly, these actions garnered global media coverage, amplifying awareness and influencing public discourse. Speculatively, they might inspire the next generation of leaders capable of driving rapid decarbonisation.

While these pathways vary in certainty, they are all possible. In fact, blocking motorways represents one of the most effective nonviolent actions at this critical moment because of these tangible changes. The case for necessity is overwhelming, grounded in the

unprecedented scale of harm unfolding now and in the near future. Never in history has there been a clearer justification for action - or stronger legal grounds to assert that there is no case to answer.

Stopping carbon emissions isn't conventional protest; it's a matter of survival. Comparing this to the farmers' protests about inheritance tax misses the mark entirely. Those actions, while addressing significant grievances, revolved around conflicting British political interests. By contrast, carbon emissions threaten *everyone*.

Imagine a flood surging down a valley. Some houses are swept away. No rational person would argue against collaboration to save lives simply because their own home is safe for a few minutes longer. With the climate crisis, we face the same inevitability: the flood will swallow us all.

In traditional protests, such as fuel blockades, farmers' demonstrations, or marches against the Iraq War, the harm being contested is specific and finite. These issues, though significant, are contained within a particular moment, place, or belief system. The climate crisis, by contrast, is not an 'issue'. It is everything. Its harm is universal, unrelenting, and eternal. This is the brave new world we face. To deny this reality is no different from denying that the Earth orbits the Sun. When Galileo presented his evidence to the Vatican, the facts were undeniable, and history has judged their rejection as superstition of the highest order. We pride ourselves on having moved past such errors. Yet here we are again, faced with a truth even more consequential. This time, it's not the Church's reputation at stake but humanity's survival.

Here's the twist: the real critique of the M25 motorway blockade isn't that it was too disruptive but that it wasn't disruptive enough. If necessity demands doing what's needed to stop irreparable harm, shouldn't we have gone further? Ironically, during the trial, the judge dismissed us as "fanatics" for acting on the moral implications of our reality. The bitter truth is that we could justifiably be criticised for not being fanatical enough.

For years, I and others have argued that the moral weight of the

climate crisis demands civil resistance, not mere protest. Protest asks for change; resistance forces it. Historically, civil resistance is justified in contexts of extreme state failure, such as replacing a dictatorship guilty of crimes against its people. The real question isn't whether civil resistance is valid but where the line is drawn. We must ask: when does inaction become morally indefensible?

Liberal democracies draw clear lines around protest: it's permitted as long as it doesn't disrupt. They're equally clear about war: it's justified when one nation invades another. But civil resistance occupies a grey area, especially when aimed at states that claim to be democratic while allowing the greatest crime in history to unfold unchecked. This brings us to a common rebuttal of our actions: why not use the democratic process instead of inconveniencing people? We'll tackle that argument in part 15, 'The Dysfunctional State: Where Democracy Fails'.

9

LOOKING AT LAW FROM THE OUTSIDE

So far I have dissected the law from within, examining how the 'right of necessity' allows harm in specific circumstances to prevent greater harm. We've scrutinised its internal logic, historical intent, and modern applicability. Crucially, we've tested its coherence: if a principle applies in one context, to be consistent it must apply in another.

But let's zoom out. What is the law? What does it aim to achieve? And what happens when it fails? A pointed critique by Real Media during the M25 trial asked this exact question: *Law - what is it good for?* If the law ceases to serve its foundational purpose, it risks losing its legitimacy entirely.

This isn't about a few rogue judges or flawed juries. It's a fundamental failure of the law itself. When the rigid application of the law defies common sense, it evokes Dickens' timeless critique: the law is an ass! This raises an explosive paradox: can the law only be upheld by stepping outside it?

So, what defines the law's highest purpose? Look no further than the inscription on the UK High Court: "the welfare of the people". Historically, this purpose was framed as divine. In pre-modern times, law was seen as God's will - absolute, timeless, and immune to human reason. Lawyers merely interpreted its earthly

application. Over time, reason supplanted divine will, though a faint echo of the divine remained. God, now the first mover, had set the principles; humans wielded them.

And now, we confront the law's greatest challenge: the deadly hyperobject of carbon emissions and ecosystem collapse. If there is still a higher law, it emerges from a visceral truth - the magnitude of this catastrophe demands it be stopped. Call it God's will, call it rational necessity; the outcome is the same. Modern law is founded on democratic values: the welfare of the people must be promoted, and threats to their existence must be eliminated. When faced with the destruction of *everything*, the law's mandate is clear: stop it at all costs.

The concept of the absolute revolves around a higher law, one underpinned by an unshakable taboo: *you do not kill*. Not your community, not your society, and certainly not the planet. This principle elevates the higher law above any normal legal framework. But what does the 'absolute' look like in practice? It mirrors the hyperobject: vast, universal, and catastrophic in its consequences.

Carbon emissions lock humanity into a future of immense and unavoidable suffering. This threat is not abstract; it is physical, tangible, and deadly. The law's fundamental purpose comes into direct conflict with the ongoing destruction caused by emissions. This isn't about beliefs or political ideologies; it's about life and death. It's akin to murder or manslaughter, except this time, it's suicide on a universal scale, a collapse that spares no one, not even the ruling class.

This makes the climate crisis fundamentally different from the moral dilemmas posed by most protests. In traditional protest cases, participants may appeal to a higher law, but judges, rightly or wrongly, often reject such claims. Consider the Thacker case. Christopher Thacker was part of a group that attempted to stop a shipment of arms destined for Indonesia, alleging the weapons would be used for human rights abuses in East Timor. Thacker and his co-defendants argued their actions were necessary to

prevent greater harm - essentially invoking the defence of necessity and appealing to a higher moral law.

However, the court rejected their argument. The judge ruled that while their beliefs were sincerely held, they could not override established law. The legal system maintained that the defendants had other legal avenues to address their concerns, such as lobbying or public campaigning, and that direct action breaking the law was not justifiable. This judgment reflects the liberal framework that prioritises the rule of law and democratic processes over individual or collective claims to moral authority.

The Thacker case highlights the tension between moral convictions and legal boundaries. It underscores the challenges activists face when trying to invoke necessity or higher law as a defence, especially when courts are cautious about setting precedents that might allow subjective moral beliefs to override the legal order.

From a liberal perspective, civil disobedience aimed at fostering a more moral society does not automatically confer the right to invoke a higher law. After all, morality is subjective. One person's conscience can become another's tyranny. People may just as passionately support war in Iraq or strict immigration controls. These are grey areas, balancing conflicting values and interests. As the judge in the M25 trial observed, sincerely held beliefs do not grant protesters the right to disrupt the public.

Some cases, however, transcend these grey areas. Matters of life and death, such as animal rights, abortion rights, or protection against deportation to certain death, push the boundaries of civil disobedience into a hybrid space, as Lord Hoffman argued, between law and politics. Even Gandhi recognised this dynamic. His defiance of British laws was not just to challenge the laws in isolation but to rally millions towards a new political settlement rooted in Indian sovereignty. While he may have invoked a higher law, his struggle remained political at its core; a conflict of competing interests.

But the hyperobject of carbon emissions is not political in the liberal sense. It is beyond ideology or interest groups. This is *objective harm* on a scale that renders all other debates moot - a violation of humanity's core interests. Current legal frameworks, designed to accommodate necessity as a defence, fail to grasp this reality. This isn't a political problem; it's a cognitive one. It demands a total reframing of how we perceive and respond to existential threats.

History is littered with catastrophic failures to grasp new realities. The human brain is wired to interpret the unknown through the lens of the familiar, often leading to disastrous category errors. When the Spanish conquistadors invaded the Inca Empire with their metal armour, guns, and horses, the Inca Emperor underestimated the threat. Lacking the mental framework to comprehend these unknown elements, he allowed his vastly larger army to be routed, leading to the empire's collapse. Similarly, in the 1930s, Western leaders dismissed Hitler as a petty nationalist, ignoring overwhelming evidence of his genocidal ambitions until it was too late.

Today, the climate crisis demands that the law rise above such catastrophic errors. Its purpose is to uncover truth and uphold justice. Yet, in practice, it often fails.

10

THE FAILURE OF THE LAW

Paradoxically, the more precise a law becomes, the more it risks undermining its purpose. For instance, if we had a vague law that simply says, 'don't be an idiot', that would raise endless questions: what constitutes being an idiot? To resolve this, lawmakers add specifics, for example, 'being an idiot' could be defined as 'threatening a neighbour with violence'. But what constitutes violence? The definition might evolve into 'physical harm caused by one person to another'. This process of refinement is infinite, and yet it never fully eliminates ambiguity.

By design, law is always partly indeterminate. This is why we need lawyers to argue cases and judges to decide their merits. For example, in the 1967 Criminal Law Act, Lord Hoffman clarified that 'crime' in certain cases should refer only to specific types of crime, not any and all crimes. His intention was to create consistency, but in doing so, he risked narrowing the law's broader purpose: to protect the welfare of the people.

This tension is evident in landmark cases like the conjoined twins ruling, where harm prevention was deemed justifiable only when harm was inevitable. Efforts to refine and clarify the law may make it easier to apply in specific cases, but they can also strip it of its universal purpose. At its core, the law must protect human

welfare - a principle at odds with how it currently operates in the face of the hyperobject.

In the so-called 'crime' case, the definition of crime itself proves woefully inadequate for our times. Lord Hoffmann, in his 2006 judgement, couldn't foresee the hyperobject of mass death looming in 2024. Similarly, the framers of the clause on "inevitable and irreparable evil" were focused on immediate, one-to-one scenarios. Their intent was clear: ensure that any harm prevented was indeed inevitable without action. But this narrow lens fails to account for large-scale threats, where certainty of inevitability isn't necessary.

You don't need a guarantee of doom to justify action. The likelihood of catastrophic harm is enough. In the Great Fire of London, those who demolished houses to create firebreaks couldn't know with certainty that the flames would spread if they didn't act, but they acted anyway - and rightly so - under the principle of necessity. Scientists warn us about hyperobjects like climate collapse with the same urgency: "You don't want to go there". Waiting for your children's deaths to become inevitable before taking action is madness.

The law must serve the welfare of the people. But what happens when lawmakers undermine this higher purpose? When they prioritise private interests over public good?

Law doesn't exist in a vacuum; it operates within politics. Essential to its authority is a sense of fairness and objectivity - a mystique that demands adherence. You can't pick and choose which laws to follow; the law is the law. But what happens when lawmakers weaponise the law to serve sectional, ideological, or private interests?

Imagine a state overtaken by a dictator, democracy collapsing in the process. In such cases, one school of thought argues the law ceases to be legitimate, justifying civil resistance to restore democracy. But reality is rarely so clear-cut.

Take Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1962. Tasked with orchestrating the Holocaust's logistics, Eichmann claimed he was simply

obeying orders, following the law of the land. His case forces us to confront a haunting question: can the law sometimes demand disobedience? Would we act differently in Eichmann's shoes? Sociological evidence suggests most of us wouldn't.

If we argue that breaking the law is sometimes justified, how do we reconcile this with the principle that laws must be followed? Even in democracies, where we assume laws reflect the people's welfare, do they always? Does a democracy inevitably uphold the higher law, or can it too betray its founding principles?

The Vietnam War provides a powerful example of how breaking the law can sometimes be justified in service of a greater moral principle. In 1971, the whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg leaked a classified set of documents known as the *Pentagon Papers*. These papers revealed that for years, the U.S. government had been lying to the American public about the progress and the true nature of the Vietnam War. The documents exposed how the government had secretly expanded the war, misled the public, and concealed the staggering costs in lives and resources. It was a damning account of governmental deceit.

However, the publication of these documents was not just a revelation, it was also illegal. Under U.S. law, publishing classified information is a serious offence, one that could lead to criminal charges. The editors and journalists at the *Washington Post*, who took the bold step of publishing these documents, knew they were breaking the law. They were risking imprisonment, and the *Post*'s legal team warned that they could face severe consequences. But despite these risks, they chose to publish the papers.

The editors argued that the public had a right to know the truth about what their government was doing in their name, especially when the information revealed the scale of deception and the devastating impact of the war. This principle - the public's right to know - was seen as a higher law, one that transcended the technical legality of withholding classified documents. By breaking the law, the editors of the *Post* upheld a moral imperative: the need for

transparency and accountability in a democratic society.

The political fallout was immediate and intense. The U.S. government, under President Richard Nixon, tried to block the publication, citing national security concerns. But the controversy surrounding the leak only grew. Public support for the war had already been waning, and the *Pentagon Papers* fuelled growing outrage and distrust towards the government. Ultimately, the government found it politically unfeasible to prosecute the editors and journalists involved, partly because of the widespread public support for their actions.

In the end, by defying the law, the *Washington Post* and its editors upheld a higher moral law; the law of truth, democracy, and the public's right to information. Their decision not only exposed the truth about the Vietnam War but also forced a national conversation about the government's accountability to its people. This case exemplifies how, in some circumstances, the higher moral law can justify actions that break the law, especially when those actions aim to protect the public from corruption, deception, and harm.

Today, we face an evil that dwarfs the lies of Vietnam and even the atrocities of World War II. Climate collapse, driven by greenhouse gas emissions, represents a crime against humanity on an unprecedented scale. Judges now have a moral imperative to invoke the higher law, declaring emissions incompatible with the welfare of the people.

The hyperobject of mass death isn't just an environmental issue - it's an existential threat, backed by overwhelming evidence. Even if courts refuse to accept necessity as a legal defence, the moral imperative remains. It's time for emergency legal action.

So, what happened in our motorway court case? Armed with 250 pages of evidence, we presented the reality of this crisis. The judge acknowledged its gravity, even agreeing on four key facts about the climate emergency. But then came the ultimate betrayal. Instead of acting to protect the people's welfare, he abdicated

responsibility, passing the issue back to the political arena.

"If there's a problem", he declared, "it's for politicians to resolve, not me".

This was more than a failure of nerves. It was an act of intellectual incoherence and moral cowardice. In the next section, we'll dissect this betrayal and explore what it reveals about the law's role in times of crisis.

11
POLITICS

…and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. — Thomas Hobbes

The judge's abdication of responsibility to politicians was no mere intellectual oversight; it was an act of calculated deflection. If carbon emissions were recognised for what they are - an enormous, systemic act of criminal harm - civil resistance would need no defence. The courts would be compelled to act decisively, to enforce the law against the greatest economic interests in society. It would be nothing short of the battle of the century; a confrontation with industries so deeply entrenched in power that they shape our very political and economic systems.

But the judiciary balked at this responsibility. By refusing to engage with the objective harm of climate collapse, they betrayed the purpose of the law itself, which is to protect the welfare of the people. Instead, they relegated the issue to politics, asserting that such monumental questions belong to parliaments and elections. Yet this very stance exposed the contradiction at the heart of their argument.

The judge insisted that "sincerely held political beliefs" have no

place in the courtroom. And yet, he asserted his own: the belief that we live in a "functioning democratic state" where these issues should be resolved. In rejecting the subjectivity of the protesters, he relied on his own subjective - and profoundly flawed - assumptions. The result was a circular logic designed to avoid responsibility, a desperate attempt to have his cake and eat it too.

If the courts acknowledged the undeniable harm of unchecked carbon emissions, they would be compelled to act heroically - to uphold the law against the most powerful forces of our age. This would mean enormous risk: challenging fossil fuel corporations, disrupting financial systems, and potentially reshaping the global economy. It would demand extraordinary courage.

But instead of stepping up, they deflected. In doing so, the judiciary submitted to private interests while cloaking their cowardice in the language of objectivity and legal neutrality. They perpetuated the monstrous lie that the greatest case for a right of necessity is merely 'protest'. The disagreement wasn't about the legal criteria for necessity, it was about the judge's refusal to recognise the objective truth of the situation.

The trial itself was designed to sidestep reality. We weren't given the five or six hours needed to present our data and arguments systematically. Instead, the courtroom operated within a closed loop, a tautology. 'Climate change' was dismissed as a matter of opinion. Because it was labelled an opinion, it wasn't discussed. And because it wasn't discussed, it remained relegated to the realm of opinion. Case closed.

This circular logic was disturbingly reminiscent of the Salem witch trials, immortalised in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. In those trials, guilt was presumed. Denying the accusation was seen as proof of guilt. Offering no defence was also taken as guilt. The only way to prove innocence was to endure the drowning test, a test that guaranteed death.

A similar dynamic played out in the Soviet show trials, where any attempt to mount a defence was taken as evidence of counter-

revolutionary guilt. In our case, even insisting on a defence was enough to provoke the system's hostility. We were dragged off to the court cells, not because we broke the law but because we dared to challenge its misuse.

This isn't only about the unjust condemnation of individuals. It's about the collapse of the biosphere, the potential annihilation of billions of lives. Humanity teeters on the edge of its last chance to grow up; to confront the catastrophic reality of what we've unleashed and to take responsibility for the future. And so we are left with a chilling truth: the very institution tasked with safeguarding justice has become an accomplice to the destruction of life on Earth. History will not judge this failure kindly.

There's an even graver consequence to the judge's decision to pass the buck to the political regime: it forces an unavoidable analysis of that regime's fitness. This raises the explosive question at the heart of all politics: when does the 'exception' apply? When, paradoxically, can a state override its own laws and norms in order to protect those laws and norms, and when does a state that is actively destroying itself lose its legitimacy and need to be overthrown to save itself?

The contemporary strategy is to deny this question altogether, to pretend it doesn't exist. The judge, true to his timidity, followed this script to the letter. In his summation, he treated the existence of a "functioning democratic state" as an immutable truth, a metaphysical fact floating above evidence or debate. As he put it, this was not a "political matter". The state simply 'is' a functioning democracy. End of discussion. By this logic, our role as protesters was to engage with its mechanisms - elections, MPs, petitions - and trust in a happy resolution.

But if we slow down and methodically examine the evidence, the cracks in this argument become glaring. The claim that we live in a functioning democracy isn't self-evident; it's deeply political and demands scrutiny. Much like the legal realm, where the necessity defence becomes undeniable when confronted with the

overwhelming facts of climate harm, analysing the political regime reveals a similar conclusion: the state is failing. And when the state fails to fulfil its core purpose - to safeguard the welfare of its people - it is not just necessary but overwhelmingly justified to overcome it.

This is where the exception applies: when the state must be challenged to protect the very principles it claims to uphold. The case for necessity in the legal realm mirrors the case for necessity in the political realm. The regime that insists on its legitimacy while perpetuating harm cannot stand unchallenged.

The judge's reasoning collapses under its own contradictions. He rejected the subjectivity of protest as irrelevant, yet relied on his own subjective - and unexamined - belief in the state's legitimacy as the foundation of his argument. He claimed politics had no place in the courtroom, then declared the political system to be infallible.

If carbon emissions and the resulting collapse of the biosphere were to be recognised for what they are - an unprecedented act of collective criminality - then the law would have no choice but to confront the powerful interests enabling this destruction. This would demand a dramatic and heroic confrontation with entrenched economic power, akin to the US government's battle against the mafia but on a far greater scale.

Instead, the judiciary has chosen to look away, ceding its responsibility and enabling criminal private interests. It hides behind the monstrous lie that the greatest case for necessity is just 'protest'. But the stakes are too high for such cowardice. The regime must be overcome, not as an act of rebellion but as a duty to protect the people and the planet from irreparable harm.

12
POLITICAL THEORY

The nature of our state is not merely a legal matter; it's deeply entwined with political theory. The law, as we've seen, deals with objective crimes, matters of criminality where society has some intersubjective consensus about right and wrong. Yet, when judges like Lord Hoffman in the *R v. Jones* case discuss the state, they're not just operating within legal boundaries; they're engaging with political theory. They're asking: who gets to make political decisions, and what makes those decisions legitimate?

The claim that we live in a democratic state and should respect its decisions isn't a legal question, it's a political one. The judge's assertion that the state is inherently legitimate reflects a specific viewpoint within political theory, one that echoes the pre-modern concept of the divine right of kings. In that worldview, rulers were seen as appointed by God and therefore beyond question. Their authority was absolute, no evidence or reason could challenge it. It wasn't about whether their rule was just or reasonable; it 'just was'.

There exists a metaphysical divide between the realm of divine judgement and the world of rationality and evidence - essentially, the mental capacities of us mere mortals. In asserting that the state is beyond the political realm, the judge, perhaps knowingly or unknowingly, aligns himself with a secularised version of the

divine right of kings argument. Consequently, he would not allow any argument or evidence in court regarding the righteousness of the case. As a representative of God, one might say he rendered his absolute judgement. The lawyers in the courtroom remained silent, complicit in this regression to a medieval worldview.

The judge asserted that the state's legitimacy exists outside the political realm, an unquestionable fact that doesn't need to be debated. To him, the state we live in is a functioning democracy, not up for discussion. And, by extension, we, as protesters, should engage with it through its mechanisms, leading to a happy resolution for all.

But if we slow down and examine the evidence, we reach a far more uncomfortable conclusion. The state's legitimacy is not an inherent fact; it must be justified. This is where reason and evidence enter the political sphere, forcing us to confront the uncomfortable truth that sometimes, the state is not fulfilling its role.

This brings us to Thomas Hobbes. His challenge to divine right in the seventeenth century shifted the debate about political legitimacy from religious authority to secular reasoning. Hobbes argued that a ruler's legitimacy didn't come from God, but from their ability to maintain order. If they failed, their authority could - and should - be questioned. This was a groundbreaking idea: political power could be challenged on rational grounds.

However, this shift also created a paradox. By asserting that rulers must maintain order to retain their legitimacy, Hobbes implicitly opened the door to the possibility that a ruler who failed to maintain order could be overthrown. Hobbes, the champion of reason, made a case for both obedience to political authority and for the challenge of that authority when it fails.

For Hobbes the notion of absolute authority can never be fully separated from its potential for abuse. His belief that a ruler's legitimacy depended on their ability to maintain order set the stage for the modern political dilemma: when does the state, in failing to protect its citizens, forfeit its right to rule?

The question of legitimacy is as crucial today as it was in Hobbes' time. The very theories that were supposed to clarify political order - theories rooted in reason - have instead shown us the complexity and dangers of political authority. In the end, the state's legitimacy is not a given; it is an ongoing debate, and when the state fails to protect its citizens, the question must be asked: does the regime still deserve to exist?

In the *R v. Jones* judgment, Lord Hoffman quotes the famous passage from Hobbes' Leviathan (Chapter 13) to make a forceful case:

> *…men live without other security, than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently, no Culture of the Earth; no Navigations, nor use of commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*

For Lord Hoffman, the state holds what he calls "the monopoly of the legitimate use of force" (section 77). This idea comes from the sociologist Max Weber, who argued that as societies modernise, the state gradually takes control of violence. In Weber's view, the state becomes the only authority that can legitimately use physical force within its borders. This means that individuals aren't allowed to use force unless the state says so.

While Weber's theory is widely accepted, it raises an important question: does he believe that the state's monopoly on violence is not just a modern development, but something morally necessary? Weber's argument fits into a broader theory about political order, inspired by Hobbes, which suggests that violence can only truly be

reduced when it's controlled by the state. As the sociologist Norbert Elias put it, this concentration of power is part of the "civilising process". The big takeaway is that people or groups shouldn't take the law into their own hands – the state should handle violence.

Lord Hoffman backs this up, quoting a previous case (*Southwark London Borough Council v. Williams, 1971*), where the law treated 'self-help' remedies with deep suspicion, allowing them only in "very special circumstances". Hoffman suggests these special circumstances line up with what we call 'necessity' – when there's an immediate threat, and no help is available in time. Basically, the state is expected to act when it can, and Hobbes also argues that necessity arises when the state can't get there in time.

But here's the big question: what happens when the state doesn't act – not because it can't, but because it chooses not to? Hoffman quotes another case, *Burmah Oil Co Ltd v. Lord Advocate* (1965), where it's suggested that individual rights to 'self-help' are now "outdated". But if the state deliberately fails to protect people, can it still be considered a legitimate state?

This is where things get tricky. While Weber's argument focuses on the historical development of the state's control over force, it doesn't rule out the possibility that the state might fail to protect its citizens, either through negligence or deliberate policy choices. What once seemed outdated – the idea that people could take matters into their own hands – could become important again if the state isn't fulfilling its role. Hoffman acknowledges this but brushes it aside as an "operational" issue (section 82). This leaves a big, unresolved question: when the state fails to protect, what should citizens do?

This is the central problem with Hobbes' theory. The state exists to protect its citizens, and citizens, in return, are expected to obey. But what happens when the state doesn't live up to that promise? History shows that the ideal state is often far from reality. When a government fails to protect its people, or when people decide they can do a better job, Hobbes' framework breaks down. He assumed

that a rational, orderly state could settle disputes through reason – but history has proven that this isn't always the case.

The fundamental question here is timeless: "Why you and not me?" This is the root of political legitimacy. From Thomas Paine's critiques of the British aristocracy to today's populist movements, this question continues to fuel political conflict. The answer, however, is rarely found through reason alone. Political legitimacy is shaped by history, power dynamics, and the subjective experiences of the people involved.

Some might want to turn to divine authority to settle these disputes. But that only brings up another question: which group gets to claim that divine authority? The challenge of political legitimacy remains, as it always has, tied to human power struggles and subjective experiences.

In earlier times, thinkers like Hobbes believed that order, even sustained by force, was necessary to avoid chaos. The state's job was to ensure that order was maintained, even if that meant using violence. But John Locke, building on this idea, shifted the focus. Instead of just talking about order, he emphasised that individuals have fundamental rights – things like life, liberty, and property – that the state should never violate. The state could maintain order, but not at the cost of these rights. If the state did, then revolution was justified. The logic behind this was simple: if the state fails to protect people's rights, then the people can and should revolt.

Fast forward to modern democracy, and the idea of who has the right to rule shifted once again. Now, it's not just about the state protecting our rights; it's about the people deciding who rules. Elections became the tool to ensure that the state operates according to the will of the people. The core idea is that anyone affected by a decision should have a say in it. If you live under a certain government, you should have a voice in the laws it makes, especially those that impact your life.

In legal terms, this is where Lord Hoffman steps in. He argues that for protestors who disrupt the system, their actions cannot be

justified by their personal views of the law or government policy. In his ruling, Hoffman says that protestors' opinions on what's legal or right are irrelevant when the state is functioning properly, with legal disputes being settled through the courts and government decisions made democratically.

But there's a catch. While Hoffman argues this within the context of a "functioning" state, he doesn't completely shut the door on the idea that the state could fail to protect its citizens. The word 'functioning' is key - it suggests that the state must both be willing and able to protect people's rights and provide for their safety. If the state fails to do this, then the situation might change.

Hoffman's logic is based on a functioning democracy, but it's clear that history isn't always so predictable. A state might be able to provide protection one day and fail to do so the next. Even in democracies, the question of whether a government is truly fulfilling its duties to its people remains a live issue.

The challenge here is how it is decided that a state is failing in its role, and once a state is seen to fail, there's no clarity about when it's justified for citizens to take matters into their own hands. Revolt, after all, is often a response to an unmet need or threat that the state isn't addressing. While Locke and Hobbes might argue that revolt is justified in specific circumstances, they don't answer the bigger question: if the state fails, who decides when it's right to act?

Ultimately, the legal right to revolution isn't a clear-cut issue. It's not just about whether the state fails - it's also about the complex, often blurry line between legitimate authority and the desire for change. And as history shows, sometimes this line is crossed when those in power don't live up to the promises of protection and justice that we expect from the state.

The 'exception' is still there - it has just taken on a different form.

13
POLITICAL PRACTICE

So much for theory, what does history tell us? How do all these ideas about sovereignty, anarchy, the functioning state, and representation play out in real life? As mentioned earlier, Lord Hoffman and his judicial followers have drifted from strict legal arguments into the realm of political theory and philosophy. There's nothing wrong with that, but it's clear they are not fully aware of the broader considerations.

Take, for instance, the judge's casual assertion that democracy is simply about electing a new government, with a nod to the Labour Party's recent victory. The problem here isn't just a narrow understanding of democracy; it's that there's no opportunity to challenge this assumption in court. Crucially, there's no space to present evidence to the judge - or to the jury - on whether the UK truly functions as a democracy. The cruel irony is that by denying us the chance to argue this point, the judge undermines the very democratic value of open, evidence-based debate.

Lord Hoffman's view is simple: the state's role is to protect the people and maintain order, while also ensuring that everyone affected by decisions is represented. These basic ideas, taken from liberal democratic theory, are not without challenge. For instance, anthropological evidence suggests that societies without states

or monopolies of violence don't necessarily descend into chaos; sometimes, lack of central authority fosters more civil behaviour. But let's accept the Hobbesian and Lockean view for now and argue within its logic. Ironically, it's this very logic that leads us to the necessity and justification of civil resistance today.

Now we face what I call the 'soft problem': is there concrete evidence showing that the UK state is failing to protect its citizens or to act democratically? And if so, could it, or should it, be replaced with something more effective? The soft problem is solvable because it's open to evidence. The judges, however, need to be careful about what they wish for - changing the goalposts won't help them here.

Before moving on to the current evidence of state failure in the face of planetary systems failure, let's look at historical cases of illegitimate states. Starting with rights, which are deeply embedded in our democratic political culture. In a functioning democracy, individuals have specific rights, and the state cannot arrest, assault, or kill them without justification. When such violations occur, they spark national scandals, with calls for accountability. While the extent of justice served is debatable, what's indisputable is that people should not be treated this way, not in a functioning democratic state, at least by Lord Hoffman's definition.

At the heart of functionality is the rule of law, which upholds non-negotiable rights. These rights are rooted in Locke's principle that individuals cannot be harmed or have their property taken without compelling justification. And crucially, such actions cannot be condoned as government policy - or, more troubling, by lack of policy.

Earlier, we discussed the balance between economic gain and harm. All economic activity involves some degree of harm. For example, we can't eliminate the risk of workplace injuries entirely. But when harm escalates, through pollution for example, it crosses a line into a political issue where local communities' rights to a clean environment clash with the economic interests of factory

owners. This is where we enter the territory of rights violations.

Moving further along the continuum, when harms become so extreme, as in the case of slavery, we see a clear violation of Locke's fundamental rights. The British state's complicity in the slave trade serves as a grim historical example. By the 1500s, slavery had largely disappeared in Northern Europe, but Britain's colonial ventures in the Americas revived it on an unprecedented scale. In the 1600s, sugar plantations, reliant on intensive labour, led to the mass importation of slaves from Africa.

The scale of this atrocity is hard to fathom; around 12 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic, with an estimated 1.5 million dying on the journey. This wasn't just a horrific loss of life, it was a deliberate violation of basic human rights, an act so extreme it eventually sparked popular outrage, leading to abolition in Britain after sustained campaigning from the 1760s to 1833.

This historical example is important because it highlights just how far governments can go in disregarding fundamental rights in pursuit of economic interests. It shows how far a state can stray from its obligation to protect its citizens and uphold justice. When the state fails in this duty, as it did with slavery, we are faced with a critical question: does such a state still deserve to be called a 'functioning democracy'? When the government chooses not to protect its people, it no longer upholds the most basic principles of Hobbesian or Lockean theory, and in that failure, it creates the very justification for civil resistance.

Moreover, the brutal realities of working on sugar plantations cannot be overstated. In French-colonial Haiti, most recently-arrived slaves would die within five years. The economics of slavery were chillingly clear: it was cheaper to import new slaves than to keep the existing ones alive. Violence was embedded in the system, with regular beatings, whippings and deaths without legal consequences. Families were torn apart without warning, never to be reunited, and black women were routinely subjected to rape by

white men.

At the heart of all these atrocities was a horrific justification: black people were seen as less than human, nothing more than property to be exploited. This dehumanisation led to devastating consequences, exemplified by the infamous Zong case of 1783. When a slave ship captain, Luke Collingwood, threw 133 enslaved Africans overboard to save on supplies, he later filed an insurance claim for the 'loss'. The Lord Chief Justice, following the letter of the law, ruled that "the case of slaves was the same as if horses or cattle had been thrown overboard". This cold legal reasoning treated human lives as mere cargo - an extension of the cruel logic that denied slaves their humanity.

This reflects a broader pattern: the irrationality of reducing people to property. When it came to slaves, they were nothing more than expendable goods, treated in law the same as cattle.

The essence of modern democracy must confront this kind of irrationality. No one should be treated as sub-human, whether to justify the divine right of kings or the commodification of human beings. It's this core principle that led to the eventual rejection of slavery in Britain after decades of struggle and pressure. People could not be treated as property; their fundamental rights to life and freedom had to be recognised.

When we think about human rights, we must prioritise the right to life and livelihood. A democratic state only remains legitimate as long as it upholds these rights. Where these rights are violated on a mass scale - such as through slavery or murder for economic gain - the state's legitimacy crumbles. No one could defend the brutality of the slave trade, not even the West African lobby, which attempted to justify slavery by claiming it was their "right to property". But this claim of ownership was meaningless when weighed against the horrifying reality of human beings being torn from their homes, families, and lives.

Slavery, as an institution, represents the absolute violation of human rights. It's impossible to argue otherwise. A state that

allows such practices is not a functioning democracy, no matter how democratic its elections may appear.

Take, for example, the Nazi regime in Germany which came to power through democratic elections and used the slave labour of its political prisoners and Jews. This exposes the fatal flaw in the simplistic definition of democracy as just the right to vote. A functioning democracy isn't only about elections; it's about a system that protects the fundamental rights of its citizens, especially the most vulnerable. As Lord Hoffman's definition of a functioning state implies, a true democracy must not only maintain order but also prevent the state from becoming the source of harm to its people.

Here's where the contradiction of Hobbesian logic - where the state holds a monopoly on violence - becomes painfully clear. What happens when the state doesn't protect its citizens but uses violence against them? The horror of Nazi Germany gives us the answer. Hundreds of thousands were arrested, sent to concentration camps, and murdered. Over 150,000 disabled individuals were killed at the onset of the war, followed by the systematic extermination of six million Jews and other minorities.

The violence wasn't random, it was calculated. It was about creating 'living space' for the German people, which meant wiping out entire populations. The invasion of eastern Europe was explicitly designed to exterminate up to 30 million people. By the end of the war, an estimated 50 million people had been killed, and another 50 million had been displaced.

The violation of rights was so extreme, so widespread, that it exposed the true limits of a state's power. A state that treats its people as expendable isn't a state at all, it's a regime built on violence and oppression. And when the state becomes the oppressor, the people have the right - the duty - to resist.

It might seem obvious when a state crosses the line from being functional to violating fundamental rights. But, as we'll see, this transition isn't always clear-cut. Looking at some of the worst

human tragedies in the last century - such as the regimes after the Russian and Chinese revolutions, or the rise of the Nazis in Germany - we realise that states don't usually leap straight into mass murder. Instead, they often take cautious, calculated steps toward it.

In 1933, the Nazi Party began with a boycott of Jewish goods, and encouraged violent mob attacks on Jews. But this effort failed, largely because Jews were deeply integrated into German society. Over the next decade, the regime systematically isolated Jews, first making them wear badges to mark their 'otherness', then pushing them into labour camps. Once physical separation was in place, mass killings became possible. The shift from state obedience to genocide wasn't sudden; it was gradual.

This raises a tough question: When does a state stop being a legitimate authority? At the heart of Hobbesian theory, which argues that the state's power is absolute, there's an assumption that the state cannot be disobeyed. This logic was famously defended by Adolf Eichmann during his 1962 trial. Eichmann, a Nazi bureaucrat, said his duty was to the state, not to morality or law. He obeyed orders without question. To him, the state's command was everything. Eichmann was the perfect example of Hobbes' idea of absolute obedience.

But what Eichmann did was monstrous. The Nazi regime wasn't a functional state; it was an industrial killing machine. Despite its appearance of order, it was deeply dysfunctional. And that's the point: history doesn't follow a perfect, linear path. Lord Hoffman's concept of a "functional state" is relative; different regimes can be ranked on a scale of functionality. At certain points, we must recognise the right to resist. This isn't just a theoretical debate, it's essential for upholding democratic values and the right to life. When the state stops protecting these rights, revolution can become not just a right, but a necessity.

Lord Hoffman himself, in his judgment, hints at this. He references acts of resistance during WWII, such as a French

resistance member trying to sabotage a German airfield. Hoffman points out that, during that time, the French state was collaborating with Nazi occupiers, making it morally and legally justifiable to oppose it. This shows that rebellion against the state isn't only justified during outright occupation; it's also justified when a government collaborates with regimes that violate human rights.

The Vichy government in France is another example. Led by Pierre Laval, the Vichy regime collaborated with Nazi Germany, believing it could protect French interests by submitting to Nazi demands. But, as historian Robert Paxton showed, this cooperation didn't save France from Nazi exploitation. Laval's collaboration made him complicit in the deportation of Jews and the enslavement of French workers. After the war, Laval was executed for his complicity. His case proves that following the law can sometimes mean betraying it. As Paxton puts it: "there come cruel times when to save a nation's deepest values, one must disobey the state".

This brings us back to the idea of a 'just war'. According to centuries of legal and political thought, it's clear that resistance is justified when faced with aggression or widespread violations of fundamental rights. The Nazi example is an extreme one, but it sets the bar for when rebellion becomes necessary. In the UK, there's room for debate on how to handle situations where the state may violate international law, as shown in recent discussions about Israeli actions in Palestine. Even the UK government has suggested that high-ranking Israeli officials could be prosecuted for genocide, showing that certain actions cross a clear line.

In the end, the lesson from the Nazis and slavery is clear: mass murder in pursuit of any ideology - be it racial, nationalist, or economic - crosses a line that cannot be justified. When states descend into genocide, we must recognise the right to revolt. Because when the state fails to protect life and livelihood, the people must act to defend their basic human rights.

Lord Hoffman argues that the UK constitution gives the state

the right to declare war, as seen in the *R v Jone*s case about Iraq. He notes that such decisions must often be made quickly, which complicates the balance between public consultation and military needs. However, he also highlights a key point: citizens who attack military infrastructure could be charged with treason for undermining the state during a war.

While this may seem straightforward, we must remember that there are situations where the state itself becomes a betrayer. This is where the concept of treason gets complicated. If a state is committing crimes against humanity or genocide, those in power are the true traitors, not the citizens resisting them.

Lord Hoffman and other judges, however, overlook the grey area between traditional wartime resistance and peaceful civil protest. The middle ground is civil resistance; nonviolent protest against a regime that systematically violates fundamental rights. This is where the right to revolution comes in. Historically, philosophers like Locke argued that if a government violates citizens' rights, they have the right to revolt. Today, we call this civil resistance - mass, nonviolent disobedience aimed at regime change. It's rare, but it's a legitimate path when governments fail to protect basic human rights.

Of course, we must judge each case carefully. The right to revolt isn't a call to arms at the first sign of trouble. We need solid evidence to determine whether a regime has crossed the line. The horrors of slavery and the Nazi regime are prime examples: they weren't just ideological mistakes, but calculated atrocities and this view is backed by undeniable facts.

As we look at modern developments, it's clear that technology is changing the game. New tools for mass control and surveillance could enable states to violate rights in ways we haven't seen before. This evolution isn't chaotic, it's a trend that will shape future conflicts. For example, the rapid transformation of Germany from a democracy to a brutal dictatorship in the 1930s shows just how quickly things can go wrong. In just 15 years, a group of political extremists took control of Germany, using the power of the state

to orchestrate the deaths of millions.

The lesson is clear: democracy requires constant vigilance. We can't predict what will happen next, but we must always be prepared to stand up when the state becomes a force for harm. As we shall see , the case for vigilance and revolutionary action has never been greater.

14
THE PRESENT MOMENT

What does vigilance reveal about the state of our democracy, particularly in the face of rising emissions? If we scrutinise the evidence, can we honestly say we live in a functional democratic state? Let's consider my M25 trial: can a jury be sure that our government is fulfilling its duty to protect its citizens? If they can't, a door opens, not just for protest but for legitimate civil resistance.

This isn't about static judgments; it's about recognising that the functionality of a state can shift. What wasn't true a decade ago might be true today - and will probably evolve over time. Judging a state's legitimacy is like hitting a moving target.

To make sense of this, imagine a meteorite heading towards London. When first identified, we might not know if it will hit Earth or where it would land. Months later, as the probability of impact rises to 1%, what should a functional state - dedicated to protecting its people - do? Should it bear the economic cost of evacuation now or wait for more certainty? Reasonable people might debate where the tipping point lies, but at a 5% probability, failure to act begins to look like negligence. At 50%, inaction becomes indefensible. The state is no longer functional; it's broken. In such cases, Hobbes and Locke would agree: when a government fails its fundamental duty, resistance is not only justified but essential.

This scenario echoes Adam McKay's film *Don't Look Up*, where a comet hurtles toward Earth, and political leaders dither, swayed by self-interest. The message is clear: a functional state must act on uncertain but serious risks; the precautionary principle demands it. Waiting too long could seal our fate.

The same logic applies to the climate crisis. The evidence is undeniable and the threats to civilisation are serious. They would lead to violations of the most basic rights to life and livelihood. History provides chilling parallels. The Atlantic slave trade forcibly transported 12 million Africans, killing 1.5 million en route and enslaving millions more for centuries. The Holocaust murdered 6 million Jews and countless others, alongside a war that displaced 50 million and killed tens of millions more.

Today, carbon emissions kill too - through heatwaves, floods, and famine. The question is: has our state crossed the line from functional to dysfunctional? If a government knowingly facilitates such destruction, the answer is yes. When that line is crossed, civil resistance isn't just an option; it's a duty.

If the UK - or any industrialised nation - continues emitting carbon on the current scale, the consequences are catastrophic: within 20 to 30 years, we're looking at 1 billion climate refugees. That's 20 times the number of people displaced by the Nazis and 90 times the number enslaved during the Atlantic slave trade.

Who are these refugees? Innocent people. Like the Africans ripped from their homelands or the Jews targeted by the Nazis, these individuals will bear the consequences of others' actions. Uprooted from their homes, forced to move vast distances, many will face hunger, violence, and death. By conservative estimates, 100 million will perish through starvation, war, and societal collapse. Another 50 million, predominantly women and children, will suffer rape and violence in the chaos.

Here's the most damning part: this isn't speculation. Unless emissions are halved by 2030, this future is a certainty. At current rates, we've got just 4 to 5 years before crossing the 2°C threshold,

beyond which the nightmare accelerates. Yet emissions in 2024 are still rising.

The atrocities of the Nazi regime and the Atlantic slave trade were monstrous, yet finite. Their victims can be counted, their histories memorialised. The climate crisis, however, represents a new moral failing. Its impacts are boundless, spanning generations and perpetuating suffering indefinitely. Rising sea levels, intensifying storms, devastating wildfires, melting glaciers, and collapsing ecosystems will continue for thousands of years.

Imagine the global trading system crumbling, triggering economic collapse and destroying billions of livelihoods; lives and careers painstakingly built over decades, wiped out. Think of all the world's coastal cities underwater, forcing hundreds of millions more to flee. Where will they go?

We've probably already passed key tipping points. Melting ice caps are unstoppable, leading to at least 5 metres of sea-level rise over the next century. The loss of planet-cooling ice from the Arctic and Antarctic pushes us towards a 3°C rise, potentially displacing another billion people.

This isn't a one-off disaster. It's a relentless cycle, like an unending chain of concentration camps or slave ships operating year after year. The suffering doesn't stop; it compounds.

No functional democratic state could justify participating in the Atlantic slave trade or orchestrating Nazi atrocities. The same applies now. In 2025, no government can claim to be functional or democratic if it continues to pump carbon into the atmosphere, knowingly unleashing suffering at a scale far beyond anything seen in human history.

The only argument against this is that it hasn't fully happened yet. That logic is absurd - call it cognitive error if you're being kind, or mind-blowing idiocy if you're not. Ignoring an imminent catastrophe because it hasn't struck yet is reckless.

The climate crisis demands realism. Ignoring it isn't just negligent; it's criminal. And when governments fail to act, civil resistance

becomes not only justified, but necessary.

Human beings constantly assess the future to protect themselves and their societies. It's basic survival. If we ignored obvious risks, everything would collapse into chaos. That's why we plan, prepare, and act, even when there's no certainty about what might happen next.

But here's the kicker: not all predictions are created equal. When we predict human behaviour - such as whether a foreign state might invade - it's a calculated guess. People can change their minds, after all. But when it comes to the natural world, there's no debate. The laws of physics don't bend to hope or negotiation And predictions about greenhouse gas emissions fall into this category.

If the Arctic warms, its ice will melt. That's not speculation; it's fact. We might argue about the exact timeline - 2030 or 2035 - but the outcome is guaranteed. Nature doesn't take requests. You can't approach a melting glacier in ten years and ask it kindly to refreeze because we've finally decided to take action.

Understanding this difference between the unpredictability of human actions and the determinacy of physical processes is basic intelligence. Denying it is not just ignorance; it's suicidal.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: in 2025, no democratic state can claim to be functioning if it knowingly continues to emit carbon. The evidence is overwhelming, and supported by thousands of scientific studies.

The consequences? Potential extinction. Within the next century, humanity could face collapse on such a scale that survival becomes impossible. Entire populations could be wiped out by starvation, war, and uninhabitable conditions. A few isolated communities might cling to life, but they won't be able to stop or adapt to runaway global heating. The result will be a hothouse Earth with temperatures soaring above 5°C. A planet that no longer supports human life as we know it.

This isn't fear mongering; it's realism. Just as no naval officer in the 1800s could ignore a slave ship or a WWII general dismiss

the threat of invasion, we can't afford to ignore the hard truths of physics and climate science.

The stakes couldn't be higher. When the system fails and the state turns destructive, revolution becomes essential - it's the only way to survive.

15

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL STATE: WHERE DEMOCRACY FAILS

Why is our state collapsing into dysfunction? To understand this, we need to confront a hard truth: the glorious concept of democracy - rule by the people, for the people - is falling apart. The idea that we, the people, control our state through our representatives has a powerful moral pull. It's built on equality: if we are all human, all fundamentally the same, why should one person, or group, wield absolute power over everyone else? If no divine authority ordains rulers, then the burning question of modernity is "Why you and not us?"

In theory, democracy offers the answer. The state makes decisions for everyone, and since we're all equal, we all get a say through voting. But here's where the cracks begin to show. The state's defenders argue that democracy is sacred. Take Lord Hoffmann's central claim: public decisions should be made through democratic processes, not disruption. He calls protests like ours undemocratic and illegal, denying us the defence of necessity.

His argument feels airtight - until you look closer. Two major flaws unravel his logic.

First, democracy's core principle is that everyone gets a say in decisions that affect them. But in practice, this isn't happening. History reveals a darker truth: our democratic ideals have always

clashed with the brutal realities of exploitation.

Start with Britain. The democratic journey from the divine right of kings to the rise of the aristocracy, through revolutions, and into the 20th century's one person, one vote, seems like progress. Yet even as democracy expanded at home, Britain built its wealth on slavery and imperialism. Africans had no vote, no voice in the decisions that were in the 'national' interest but that destroyed their lives and livelihoods.

This contradiction didn't end with the abolition of slavery or the independence of colonised nations. Capitalism, powered by industrialisation and bureaucracy, ensured exploitation continued. The machine of imperialism morphed but never stopped. Today, decisions made in one nation ripple across the globe, while those most affected, whether in exploited communities or future generations, have no representation.

Second, democracy's promise of equality has been betrayed by the very systems meant to protect it. Modernity, with all its technology and bureaucratic efficiency, hasn't just advanced democracy, it's also enabled its darkest opposites. Hitler's Nazi regime, for example, used modern tools to systematise mass extermination, excluding millions from the 'community of the state'. Stalinist and Maoist regimes, too, turned modernity's power against their own people, resulting in unimaginable suffering.

These aren't just historical footnotes. They expose the deeper flaw: democracy, as we know it, was designed for simpler times. In today's interconnected, industrialised world, national decisions often harm those beyond a state's borders - those who have no vote or say. Carbon emissions are the ultimate example. Decisions made in boardrooms and parliaments today will tomorrow devastate millions of people who have no say.

This is the state's dysfunction. Its claim to democratic legitimacy is hollow because it excludes the very people it affects most. This failure is why our disruption isn't merely justified - it's necessary.

Let's make one thing clear: we're not abandoning democracy.

We're demanding its rebirth, one where everyone - across borders and generations - has a real voice. The old model has collapsed under the weight of its contradictions. It is time for a new vision of power, justice, and equality.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet communism, many believed the liberal model had triumphed. Neoliberalism promised that democracy, tied to global capitalism, could lead to the 'end of history' - a world of universal enrichment rather than exploitation. The narrative painted a steady march of progress. Universal suffrage expanded through the 19th and 20th centuries, and the spread of democratic regimes seemed to confirm a liberal worldview.

But this ignores the darker side of the 'machine'. Across history, three stages of destruction have unfolded. The first, during the proto-industrial era, unleashed the horrors of Atlantic slavery; a barbarism tied to specific places and times, later dismantled by economic and political progress. The second stage, in the 20th century, brought the universalisation of barbarism under regimes like the Nazis, Stalinists, and Maoists. Their devastation, though immense, was contained within certain borders and decades. Once these regimes collapsed, the rebuilding of cities and institutions allowed societies to recover.

Now we face the third stage: a universal and permanent assault on nature itself. For centuries, humanity treated the natural world as infinite and disposable. Even Marx, the great critic of capitalism, hardly mentions the idea of natural limits. His gaze, like that of other modernists on both the left and the right, was firmly fixed on the material gains of humans in the present or near future.

But the 21st century has exposed the hard limits of this worldview. Most critical is the finite amount of CO_2 the atmosphere can absorb before triggering irreversible damage to the biosphere. The machine's destruction has gone global and eternal, cutting across both space and time.

This destruction mirrors historical patterns of exclusion and

extermination. Just as the slave trade dehumanised millions for the wealth of the west, today's fossil fuel-driven industrialisation sacrifices hundreds of millions in the global south. The 'other' is no longer forcibly expelled or confined to concentration camps; they are left to die in situ from climate disasters - heatwaves, floods, droughts, and social collapse.

But there's a new twist: time itself. Climate oppression doesn't end after a generation. It leaves the most vulnerable trapped indefinitely, with no reprieve. And now the 'other' includes children in wealthy nations. While those in the tropics face a deadly climate casino - never knowing which year will bring disaster - the children of today will inherit an unliveable world. Rising emissions push us toward 2°C of warming within 15 years, triggering mass migrations, economic collapse, and famine.

The real horror? This isn't just a crisis for today or tomorrow; it's a catastrophe for the next thousand generations. Feedback loops, from melting ice caps to collapsing ocean currents, are setting off a chain reaction that locks in destruction for centuries. Without action, it's not just our grandchildren who will suffer, it's the survival of humanity itself that's on the line.

Today, representatives wield near-godlike power, making decisions that affect every person, across all time. Worse, their inaction threatens to extinguish future humanity. They hold the power to destroy but cannot consult those they condemn.

What's the solution? A global legislature where everyone, past, present, and future, has a say? It's a metaphysical impossibility. The unborn cannot vote. Our power is dangerously one-sided: we can destroy everyone, but we can't ask if they are happy about it.

This crisis is magnified by the outdated machinery of 18th-century institutions. Politicians operate on four-to-six-year election cycles, pandering to voters' short attention spans. Complex, long-term challenges like the climate crisis are overshadowed by short-term concerns. Massive lobbying power, not just of fossil fuel companies but of the entire economic elite, enforces their entrenched ideology

of economic growth, prioritising consumption, production, and therefore high emission levels.

This situation represents a collective action problem of overwhelming rigidity. While it is in everyone's objective interest to see emergency action, no one wants to move before others do, resulting in a standstill. The public, politicians, media, and economic lobbies are caught in a death spiral. Politicians fear losing votes; the media avoids uncomfortable truths; corporations resist change to protect profits. The public, disillusioned, believes nothing will change - and so nothing does. The result? Short-termism leads to long-term disaster.

Representative democracy, meant to solve collective problems, now perpetuates them. Politicians kick major issues down the road, reinforcing a vicious cycle of inaction. The structural flaws of democracy aren't just inconveniences - they're pathways to endless suffering.

Courts, too, fail to rise to the challenge. They reduce life-and-death struggles to 'protests' and block juries from hearing the full truth. This circular injustice mirrors witch trials of old; the belief in witchcraft justified further accusations, just as the dismissal of protests justifies further prosecutions. Despite centuries of the Enlightenment, we find ourselves trapped in a new, universal psychosis.

The dysfunction of the state and its crumbling democratic foundations reveal a stark reality: the structures we once trusted to protect equality, justice, and the collective good are not merely failing, they are actively perpetuating harm. The democratic ideals of representation and accountability are now hollow promises, undermined by short-termism, exclusion, and the unchecked power of a few over the many.

But acknowledging this failure is not an endpoint; it's a call to action. We cannot afford to remain trapped in outdated systems that enable destruction on a planetary scale. The challenge before us is immense: to reimagine and rebuild democracy for an interconnected world, one that respects the voices of all, across

borders and generations.

This is not a task for the timid. It demands courage, imagination, and relentless determination to fight for a system that serves humanity and the natural world, not corporations or short-term political interests. The collapse of old models is not the death of democracy - it's the chance for its rebirth. Our disruption is a necessity, not a choice, because history shows us that change comes only when the status quo is confronted.

This isn't just about a few protesters on the M25; it's about an existential crisis for the state itself. A treasonous elite is propping up a dysfunctional regime, complicit in humanity's suicide. In such moments of total crisis, law and politics collide. Revolution isn't just a right - it's an obligation.

16
COMPLEXITY

So, where does that leave us? A court case that fused cold, toxic rationality with the brute force of economic power. Protesters locked away for daring to act as if the truth were real, sacrificed on the altar of a far greater crime. But this isn't just some one-off drama or a blip in humanity's onward march. It's the main event.

Throughout this book, I've used analogies to help us make sense of this grim spectacle: lung cancer consuming a body, a meteor obliterating a city, or now, the hyperobject - a vast, looming threat that transcends time and space. These crises don't just arrive out of nowhere; they brew beneath the surface until they erupt, dragging the past into the present and exploding into our future.

This section unpacks the narrative of *complexity*. It's a tale woven through three threads: a) the birth of the machine; b) the rise of a hidden machinery of harm, and c) how this unstoppable force seems to drive us towards extinction.

THE MACHINE

The story begins with modernity's most celebrated offspring: science and technology. These gave us industrialisation, and with it came Britain's ocean-going ships armed with cannons. What followed was imperial conquests, the violent suppression of

opposition, and the largest-scale slavery Europe had ever seen.

This wasn't a side effect of progress. It was the engine driving it. The slave trade didn't just fund the British Empire, it embodied its logic, laying bare the contradictions at modernity's core. A system celebrated for improving human lives relied on unimaginable suffering to achieve it.

For over fifty years, British abolitionists fought to dismantle the slave trade. Their efforts culminated in the 1833 ban on slave ownership. But let's not kid ourselves that slavery was a one-time moral failure in an otherwise steady march of progress. It was just the first chapter in a long, brutal story of industrialisation and imperialism.

After nearly a hundred years of extractive colonialism, the Nazis arrived - a moment many insist was unique in history. And in some ways, it was. The totalitarian nature of Hitler's regime, its genocidal ideology, and its central figure - the Führer - set it apart. But let's not overlook the machine behind it.

Without industrial capacity, bureaucracy, and the cultural processes born of modernity, the Holocaust would have been impossible. The same machine that powered Britain's imperial ambitions enabled mass slaughter on an industrial scale.

To understand this is not to downplay the horrors of the Holocaust but to see the system that made them possible. Because understanding that system is key to preventing such atrocities from happening again.

Modernity's machine - the merging of industrial, bureaucratic, and cultural systems - was hailed as humanity's saviour. Instead, it has become the architect of humanity's demise. The hyperobject of the climate crisis is the machine's ultimate creation: vast, uncontrollable, and devastating. It grows from a past riddled with injustice and destruction, erupting into a present where we imprison those who resist it. And this points to a future where our survival hangs by a thread.

This is the story we must confront - a story not of progress, but

of complexity driving us towards extinction. The machine, once a tool for human advancement, is now an engine of destruction. And the question isn't just what to do about it, but whether we can stop it in time.

THE HIDDEN MACHINERY OF HARM

Modernity's rise gave us immense material power. Machines, specialisation, and technical advances enabled the production of goods and services on an unprecedented scale, serving tens of millions within nation-states. But this isn't just a story of progress. That same machinery enabled the most destructive war in history: World War II.

Modern production systems scaled globally, sourcing materials and delivering products across continents. This scale made it possible to kill millions in days. Death camps, mass bombings, and nuclear weapons are not relics of barbarism; they are creations of industrial efficiency. Before modernity, the capacity for such horror simply didn't exist. A warlord might dream of annihilating a country, but without industrial machines, it would remain a fantasy. Today, a button press could achieve it.

And this shift doesn't stop at material capability; it cuts into the moral fabric of society. Consider the division of labour. In pre-industrial times, a swordmaker who crafted a weapon for a murderer would feel the moral weight; they forged the blade and they saw the intent. But in the modern era, workers create fragments of a larger whole, with parts assembled elsewhere, often without knowledge of their purpose. This leads to a severing of moral responsibility.

For example, someone might produce a simple metal component, unaware it will become part of a killing machine. "I'm just doing my job", they say. Proximity, both physical and emotional, has disappeared. This erosion of moral clarity is deepened by the gradual nature of modern production. No single moment defines when participation shifts from benign to malign. A factory worker

may begin by producing general vehicles, move to military models, and eventually contribute to genocide kits - all without a clear point of moral reckoning.

This obscurity fosters a focus on the immediate task: crafting high-quality components, meeting deadlines, and avoiding mistakes. Pride in workmanship obscures the ultimate purpose of the product. Moral attention narrows to the here-and-now, ignoring the broader consequences. This dynamic isn't theoretical, it's documented. Take the technicians who built gas vans for Nazi mobile killing units. Their discussions revolved around technical problems, using sterile terms like "solid fluids" and "liquid fluids," rather than confronting the vans' true purpose of mass murder.

The same dynamics play out in bureaucracies. Modern states, built on Hobbesian logic, claim a monopoly on violence to maintain order. Over centuries, the state has expanded its role, embedding itself in society through law enforcement and social services. But this has hollowed out the influence of non-state actors - such as churches and civic groups - leaving the state as the dominant authority.

With this growth comes bureaucracy; specialised offices, each handling narrow tasks. Responsibility is diffused across layers of administration, making it hard to trace the consequences of any single action. A bureaucrat in one office might process shipping forms, unaware that the shipments involve human trafficking. Another might issue ID cards, oblivious to their use in forced labour camps. Each task seems harmless in isolation, but together, they form a chain of systemic harm.

This diffusion of responsibility creates a moral fog. Workers and officials excel at their roles without confronting the outcomes. They can say "I did my job well", even when their efforts contribute to atrocities. In the past, the swordmaker couldn't escape the moral consequences of their craft. Today's cogs in the machine are shielded by scale, complexity, and distance.

This is the hidden machinery of harm: an industrial and bureaucratic system that enables mass death while eroding moral

accountability. And it's not a relic of history, it's the defining feature of modernity.

Morality doesn't vanish in these systems; it just becomes focused on one thing: getting the job done. Everyone has targets, and transparency drives efficiency. Managers set the goals, and employees are there to meet them, becoming 'good' by sticking to the rules and routines.

What's crucial here is that the machine doesn't need individuals to want to do evil or be passionate about violence. This is a stark contrast to pre-modern acts of 'othering', such as street violence, mob actions, and pogroms. The scale of atrocities like the Nazi Holocaust needed a different approach: a system where emotion was suppressed, not stirred up. All that was required was for individuals to do their jobs. The focus was on calm, methodical predictability, a key trait of the bureaucratic machine.

This mindset underpins everything, turning actions into processes to be optimised and regularised without disruption. Group pressure discourages raising objections, especially moral ones. The ultimate value becomes efficient delivery, contributing to a society that is regularised and hygienic.

The goal is a single type of citizen - the obedient citizen of the state. This requires defining boundaries and identifying the 'other'. This logic builds momentum, leading to overreach. The regime sets the objectives, and bureaucrats work out the best way to achieve them, however dark those goals may be. This moral imperative for efficiency leads to mission creep, especially when objectives are unclear or contradictory.

In their drive to be good administrators, officials inflated production figures for the gassing of Jews, transporting thousands of Hungarian Jews to camps in the final months of the war, using crucial resources needed for the Soviet advance. Once the system was in place, it seemed unstoppable. A hallmark of modernity is its unfinishedness; it doesn't just struggle to know when to stop - it can't stop. The machine strips away not only moral judgment but

also human agency itself. Complexity, as we'll see, reveals a reality in which we lose control.

The stark reality of this system was exposed in the 1962 Eichmann trial. Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking Nazi official, was responsible for the logistics of transporting millions of Jews to their deaths. This wasn't just a fanatical mission; it was a logistical challenge requiring coordination across many state elements. This was modernity's specific evil - ordinary people simply doing their jobs. As Hannah Arendt put it, Eichmann wasn't a fanatic; he was a man who couldn't think in the fundamental sense. He considered himself a good worker, focused on the efficient functioning of the state, obeying the law, and following orders.

Eichmann's descent into horror wasn't instant, it was a slow, steady process. In the 1930s, he was a 'Jewish specialist', facilitating voluntary emigration for Jews. He wasn't passionate about the people he dealt with; it was just his job. Before the Final Solution, Eichmann worked on plans to deport Jews to places like Madagascar or the Urals. When the decision was made to exterminate Jews in camps, it was just another project, following orders, obeying the law.

This desensitisation was deliberate, preparing the German population for mass indifference to the killings. Jews and other marginalised people were marked with badges, segregated into ghettos and camps, their humanity abstracted. By the time mass killings began, ten years of preparation had made resistance seem unnecessary. The violence was somewhere else while individuals focused on their own lives. This wasn't pre-modern hatred; it was modern indifference.

This indifference wasn't just with ordinary citizens; it extended to elites - business leaders, scientists, church officials. Many were more focused on their work than on ethical questions. The project, not the people, took precedence.

Today, we must ask: would ordinary people act any differently? Bureaucracy is at the heart of modern life for millions. The

dynamics of specialisation, sequencing, and objectification are more pervasive than ever. This is how society works, it's normal, mundane, even boring. And that's the problem: banality.

There were millions of 'little Eichmanns' ready to do their jobs, leaving the big decisions to their superiors. The superiors viewed themselves as cogs in the machine, loyal not just to the state but to their colleagues. Raising moral objections risked professional consequences. The issue wasn't a lack of moral principle but a redirection of it to immediate contexts that distracted from the broader moral questions about the system.

As Arendt powerfully identifies, this is the true horror: focusing only on the orders. The order itself was the moral value; actions became radically relativised. The only moral question was whether the orders were followed. As Arendt put it, "Since in one way or another the whole of respectable society had succumbed to Hitler, the moral maxims that determine social behavior and the religious commitments - 'thou shalt not kill!' - had virtually disappeared."

We understand these dynamics well. Films, books, and conferences have explored them. But despite this knowledge, we fail to see the parallels with our present reality. By framing events like the Holocaust as unique, we create a mental distance that makes its lessons feel abstract, irrelevant to today. We're focused on careers and job security, too busy to think about the big picture. The same dehumanising mechanisms are at work today, but we're conditioned to ignore them.

At the core of this is rationality. Modern life isn't just about physical production; it requires a specific kind of thinking: instrumental reason. This way of thinking is active and results-driven. It's essential for organising society, but when it becomes all-consuming, it marginalises other ways of being. Think about how easily we get caught up in work, productivity, and outcomes, sidelining morality, creativity, or simply enjoying life. In earlier societies, 'getting things done' was just one part of life, not the whole.

This instrumental approach turns morality into a tool for

achieving results. What's considered good is judged by its usefulness - what does it produce? This kind of thinking, rooted in the so-called neutrality of science, shapes the modern world. It promotes endless material progress, often without considering the unintended consequences.

The problem is, we can't see beyond our narrow focus on what works here and now. The system we've built to control pre-modern chaos - centralising power and violence - creates a different kind of dysfunction. The real harm is hidden at the core of the system, while we busy ourselves fixing its surface.

The 20th century showed how this logic could lead to horrifying moral degradation. The Nazis used this cold rationality to justify cruelty and terror, with each action aimed at maximising death with minimal resources. In the process, it colonised the entire system, corrupting everything it touched.

As mentioned earlier, the first step in the Nazis' horrific plan was to isolate the Jews, turning the category of 'Jew' into an abstract concept rather than a reality. This process eroded the potential for resistance, making it easier to accept indifference. The Nazis then negotiated with Jewish leaders and councils to reduce their costs during a time of war strain. These leaders were tasked with registering Jews and organising their forced relocation into ghettos. Ironically, in trying to maintain order, they sought to use instrumental reason to organise and protect their communities. In their fear of chaos, they confined themselves within ghettos, believing this would be safer. Yet it wasn't pre-modern violence they were facing - it was modernity itself, with demands for clear structures and categories.

This soon led to the Nazis demanding a more streamlined approach for transporting people to the new death camps. Instrumental reason took over, leading to the chilling game of life and death: Jewish leaders were told they could organise the killing of a set number of their people or the Nazis would choose a larger group. It was framed as a save-what-you-can game. Jewish

authorities selected individuals for death rather than allowing the Nazis to choose a greater number. For the Nazis, the system was designed to create the illusion of choice, preventing resistance. But as each selection was made, it became harder for anyone to say 'no'. Over time, the Jewish councils were even involved in the logistics; organising the trains, managing arrivals, and cleaning up afterwards. Meanwhile, the Nazis watched from the sidelines, happy with the reduced costs.

In the Warsaw ghetto, around 300,000 people were initially imprisoned. The game continued until only 60,000 remained. Eventually, the tipping point came. The desire to resist, to die with dignity, became stronger than the fear of death. And so, the battle began, a resistance that lasted longer than expected, but ultimately most perished in the fighting. In that moment, there was a reassertion of pre-modern morality: the refusal to bargain the lives of others away. Jewish tradition forbids bargaining for survival at the expense of others. Maimonides, in the *Fundamentals of the Torah*, said: "If the pagan should tell them, 'Give us one of yours, and we shall kill him; otherwise, we will kill all of you', they should all be killed, and not a single Jewish soul should be delivered".

The cruel irony is that instrumental reason, designed to ensure survival, ended in catastrophe. As Bauman puts it, "When God wanted to destroy someone, He did not make him mad. He made him rational." Most Jews were killed at far less cost to the Nazi authorities than if they had simply refused to cooperate. But that's not the 'rational' path. As Arendt points out, there is a clear right and wrong.

This episode isn't just a tragic anomaly to condemn and move on. It's a stark example of the same logic that fuels modern industrial states. Once Hitler gained control, the people were effectively powerless to prevent the descent into barbarism. The failure to protest when it first set insecurely in power made the prevention of its logical culmination almost impossible. This logic of 'if you don't do this, it will be far worse' was employed not just by the

Nazis, but by leaders like French Prime Minister Laval. Laval, thinking he could do it better, facilitated the deportation of Jews to the camps and sent young French workers to Nazi factories. In the end, he was hanged for it.

What differentiates the modern totalitarian state from earlier systems isn't the use of instrumental reason, it is how extreme and pervasive it has become. Historically, empires like the Mongols used instrumental reason to great effect, conquering civilisation after civilisation. The British Empire mastered it to rule India with a mere 50,000 bureaucrats. Stalin and Mao perfected it, using it to control massive populations. Mao's strategy was clear: "Win over the majority, oppose the minority, and crush all enemies separately." Whole groups were targeted for elimination - intellectuals, peasants, capitalists - and quotas for killing and deportation were set to ensure minimal resistance.

This is modern rationality in its darkest form. It was not driven by old-style passion, but by an organised, bureaucratic logic that led to mass death. Stalin's system sent tens of millions to the Gulags, where reason wasn't the passport to progress, it was the passport to hell.

This might seem far removed from today's neoliberal world, where we are told we've left all that behind, with liberal institutions, the rule of law, and a globalised economy. But underneath it all, the same system of rationalisation drives modernity. The same god of progress, powered by technology and driven by calculation, continues to dominate. It's about doing what works best; instrumentalism at its core.

Once in power, this rationality can be wielded to outsmart opponents playing by the same rules, ensuring their inevitable defeat in the ongoing games of power. What begins as the pursuit of progress spirals into a state of terror, and today, this drive for progress is more dominant than ever. The core dysfunction of instrumental reason remains, much as it did in Stalin's Politburo. Even stock market traders embody this logic: What can I do to

expand my system, my power, my output? In neoliberal terms, this is self-interest. And self-interest, by definition, demands progress, an endless drive to get things done.

But individuals playing by the system's rules ultimately lose in the long run. This isn't just a feature of terror regimes; it applies to the global economic, financial, and political systems too. Take the traders before the 2001 dot-com crash. Many saw the impending collapse, but it wasn't in their interest to speak out. The rational move was to stay with the herd. Going against the tide meant risking financial losses and possibly even their own jobs. So they stayed silent, and when the crash came, they all went down together. No one stood out as the one who made the wrong call.

Countless examples echo the decisions made in the ghettos. It's not a one-off event; it's embedded in the very framework of the modern system, driven by instrumental reason. If traders had acted with a different belief system - say, for example, virtue ethics - they might have seen the wrong in pushing stocks bound to crash. Collective action based on ethics could have led to a softer landing. A soft landing would save not just a group of traders, but possibly civilisation itself.

However, the system's dysfunction ebbs and flows. After collective disasters, restraint often follows, but soon enough, the next generation forgets those lessons. A finance professor I spoke to at King's College, London, suggested a thirty-year cycle: one generation learns the lesson, but the next, without the scars of disaster, repeats the same mistakes. This has happened repeatedly in finance and politics. After WWII, civil duty and collective responsibility prevailed for a generation, but by the 1970s, individualism and instrumentalism took over. Now, we find ourselves in a world governed by self-interest.

The more successful a period of collective restraint, the harder the crash when it comes - at least in finance. The Minsky principle argues that the very success of state-controlled banking up until the 1980s bred complacency. Trust was high, but it blinded people to

the reckless risk-taking that led to the 2008 financial collapse. This principle applies to all systems, not just finance.

Elite groups aren't blind to this. Economists worked out the mathematics of it back in the 1950s and 60s. Optimisation models often lead to collapse, and the 'collective action problem' explains why. If everyone pursues their self-interest, the public good suffers. If everyone 'free rides', no public goods are created, leading to the breakdown of order. This harms democracy, financial systems, and ecology alike. The 'tragedy of the commons' - where overgrazing depletes shared resources - is just one example.

Take the CEO I spoke to from California, who changed careers in response to the ecological crisis, and now sells low-carbon fuel. When he approached one of the world's largest companies, their first question was "How much does it cost?" This is self-interest at its purest, and it shows the system's fatal flaw.

Even the academics who modelled these problems in the 1950s and 60s faced their own collective action problem. They had the proof that systems built on self-interest self-destruct. Yet, like good economists, they acted in their self-interest and did nothing. Speaking out would have served the public good but threatened their careers. As a result, the collective action problem was quietly shelved.

After World War II, the machine accelerated, and the ultimate collective action problem - the final endpoint of irrational rationality - emerged unnoticed by those in power. The debate around the Nazi era centres on two opposing views of modernity. One interpretation sees the rise of Hitler as a freak event, a one-off eruption of pre-modern barbarism. The Nazis, using divide-and-rule tactics combined with brutal terror, exploited the power of the modern state, its bureaucracy and economy, to murder millions. In this view, modernity was an innocent bystander, exploited for evil.

The opposing view is that this bureaucratic and economic machine was never neutral. In fact, it was built for barbarity. It had the power to create death and destruction, driven by an ideology

that prioritised rationalism and instrumentalism. This machine was a monster designed to destroy, with its legacy rooted in the industrialisation of slavery and the brutal exploitation of workers and colonised peoples in the 18th century.

A more centrist take might acknowledge that the machine, though capable of mass evil, could also do some good such as improving living standards. But its potential for cruelty depended entirely on who was in charge. This machine wasn't neutral; it was driven by a deep-seated ideology of constant improvement. Perfection was the goal, and cruelty was justified as a means to an end. As Camus pointed out, this machine rationalised destruction in the name of creating a 'perfect' society. The end goal was always more: more technology, more control, more efficiency.

But perfection is unattainable. The system can never reach an endpoint. It's an endless drive to meet one target after another. This ideology was shared by both capitalist and communist states during the Cold War, though they were in fierce competition. From a broader perspective, the real divide wasn't between these two systems, but between the materialistic, Western-driven ideology of the machine and the anti-materialist worldviews of the east. This is the true long-term struggle.

Even during World War II, the technocrats were quietly taking over while the left and right battled it out. In France, for example, the Vichy government was run by bureaucrats who organised the transfer of Jews to death camps and forced young men into Nazi factories. At the same time, they were laying the groundwork for the post-war prosperity that would follow. The real power behind the machine wasn't the loud voices of propaganda; it was the army of quiet bureaucrats - the little Eichmanns - who ran the system from within.

This technical bureaucracy was honed in the chaos of war. Whether in the US, UK, Germany, or Russia, the same questions were asked: "What needs to be done? How can we do it well?" Anything outside those lines was ignored.

But the system came with unintended consequences. Modern rationality was obsessed with production, but it ignored the waste and externalities that came with it. As the philosopher George Bataille noted, traditional cultures dealt with surplus by giving it away or destroying it, while modern rationality insisted that surplus be reinvested to create more. Thus, waste rather than scarcity became the real threat. Bataille's warning was spot on.

Now we're dealing with the consequences of this runaway system. Complexity breeds more complexity, and the system has grown to a point where we're all trapped in it. At what point do you take a stand? As workers in a factory making parts for mobile gas chambers, the order comes, and you comply. You don't question it. In the end, you become part of the problem, just like the workers who were complicit in Nazi atrocities without ever directly causing harm.

This dilemma is rooted in both material production and consumption, and the ideology that drives it. The system's ultimate waste is no longer just toxic chemicals or economic collapse; it's the greenhouse gases we're pumping into the atmosphere, pushing global temperatures past the 2°C threshold. The system is now on the brink, and the stakes are higher than ever.

The historical trends that have led us here are not new. This isn't a sudden crisis, it's been decades in the making. And it's a global problem. This machine of progress, of rationality, has been moving forward for centuries, with technocrats at the helm. It's like a doctor reading an X-ray, you can argue about the details but the killer fact is clear: we're exceeding 2°C. That's the problem.

Take the M25 court case, for instance. The judge is just doing his job, focusing on outcomes without grasping the bigger picture. The government has changed the law, and those involved must face long prison sentences. Job done. But the system, the machine, is the real story here. People are in denial about its true nature. It's not just another protest, this is a fight against a system heading for mass destruction.

What we see today is a state and law enforcement system that's designed to suppress small-scale disruptions, yet it completely overlooks the massive crime at the heart of it all - the crime committed by the state itself. The law is looking in all the wrong places. This process of monopolising violence within the state has reached its peak, and what makes it so powerful is also what makes it suicidal. It's a classic example of the Minsky principle, but on a much larger scale. It's not just about finance, it's about an entire system going wrong. It is instrumental reason gone rogue, universal, hegemonic, and totalitarian.

We're now living in a world full of ironies. The so-called 'age of no ideology' has morphed into an era dominated by the most dangerous ideology of all: neoliberalism. This system claims it has no ideology, only a focus on 'efficiency' - but that's the most effective ideology of all because it hides in plain sight. It's everywhere, almost invisible, shaping what we think of as common sense: just getting things done, driven by professional pride and careerism. But in the process, it's leading us straight towards extinction.

So how does this happen? If we think of society as a complex expanding system, there comes a point when it reaches a threshold and crashes. If that system has the power to destroy life itself, the crash becomes inevitable. This isn't something that happens overnight. It's a gradual process, where the system grows until it's pushing towards extinction. Sociologist Ulrich Beck, in the 1990s, pointed out that the traditional ideologies of the left and right have been overtaken by a much more immediate question: risk. As our systems become more complex, we can't even assess risks properly, let alone avoid them.

Here's a thought experiment. Imagine you're faced with a choice: If you double your consumption and everyone else does the same, there's an X% chance the whole system will collapse. Would you go ahead? Now, flip that: If you halve your consumption and everyone else does the same, that X% chance drops to near zero. Would you do it? To put it even more starkly: if continuing with your current

lifestyle means your children face starvation, would you change? It's a question of probability.

Now let's break it down. There are two factors in this equation: complexity and destructiveness.

- **Complexity**: At first, things are clear. You can see the consequences, and you can measure risk. But as complexity grows, things become less predictable, and by the time you realise something's gone wrong, it's too late to intervene.
- **Destructiveness**: Some actions are destructive but limited in time and place - like the Atlantic slave trade. It was horrific, but its effects didn't spread beyond a specific area and time. The scale grew with the Second World War but it only lasted a decade. But today, with the climate crisis, destruction is all-encompassing and everlasting.

To put it simply: we are living in a system that is too complex to fully understand, and the destruction it causes is too widespread to escape. Everything is connected, and any action could push us closer to the point of no return. Even the smallest choices - like going on holiday - could be the tipping point that drives us towards collapse.

And it's not just about climate change. It's about the system itself. The way our institutions, the law, and even the courts operate assumes everything is simple and linear. But we're no longer in a world where a judge can say, "How does sitting on a motorway affect climate change?" Every action we take, from the energy we consume to the products we buy, is part of a global system that pushes us towards disaster. We're all contributing to this, whether we realise it or not.

EXTINCTION

The real kicker is that we're already on the edge. Each day, we're getting closer to the point of no return. But it's not just an abstract risk - it's a real, immediate threat. We're all responsible, and we all have to decide: do we continue on this path, or do we take action before it's too late? The clock is ticking.

We're facing a crisis that goes far beyond just greenhouse gases. There are multiple planetary boundaries we're crossing, and each one brings us closer to global collapse. The tipping point isn't the result of one bad decision; it's because the global system has hit its limit. We don't need a dictator like Hitler or Stalin anymore. The system itself is in charge now, it's running the show.

This is where the psychology of submission comes into play. Just like the German population falling into apathy during WWII, we're now seeing something similar. The collective action problem, which once seemed like a simple issue of figuring out what to do and when, has grown exponentially. Now, we're overwhelmed by what are called 'existential risks', massive threats that feel too big to deal with. Every new crisis becomes just another news headline, another thing to feel morally exhausted about.

Take AI, for example. Many experts now warn that it poses an existential risk, with some suggesting a 10% chance it could cause human extinction. The problem is, no one knows for sure - not even the experts. We're all already tangled up in AI systems, from our work to our everyday lives. It's not as simple as opting out; boycotting AI would mean boycotting nearly everything. It's the final nail in the coffin for the collective action problem.

We're in a corner now. In theory, the only way to make real change is for everyone to act. Everyone must stop everything for it to make sense for anyone to do anything. But in practice, we don't know what that tipping point looks like. For example, we all need to stop using oil, but unless everyone does it, the economic costs are too high for any individual action to make a difference. What's the point of cutting emissions if other countries keep on polluting? It feels like a waste of effort. It seems rational to just keep going.

This is where resistance feels futile. It's like fighting a machine that's too powerful to defeat. The system is built to perpetuate itself, and trying to resist it feels like you're just delaying the inevitable. The machine moves on, year after year, and it seems like nothing we do can stop it. But that's the trick: the system that built the

machine also keeps us from acting together. It's telling us not to be foolish and step out of line. But if we listen to the evidence, we're heading straight towards extinction.

Think back to the year 2000. It feels like a different time when there were still options. By 2010, we were teetering on the edge. And now, in 2025, it's clear that we're reaching the endpoint. We're surrounded by existential threats that have become so normal, we're numb to them. Even the most passionate activists are struggling to stay motivated. Denial becomes necessary just to get through the day.

Our politics feels stuck in an old playbook, united against the far-right when the real enemy is the centre itself: the technocrats, the people running the system. Business as usual is the enemy. The system doesn't need anyone to push a button or start a war. It will collapse on its own if we keep going as we are.

Today, the machine has taken over everything. A dictator isn't needed. The state is now just the administrator of this system. The machine itself is the enemy. It's not just a system anymore; it's a force that has to be dismantled for our survival.

We can't negotiate with it any longer. The time for that is long past. For decades, we've been promised carbon cuts, yet emissions keep rising. The Earth's heat imbalance has doubled in the last 15 years. All the indicators are flashing red. In a decade, it could be too late.

So, what do we need? Absolute action. The whole system has to be dismantled. It's time to say 'goodbye to all that'.

17
GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

We know next to nothing about how to stave off the threat of a murder which masquerades as a routine and unemotional function of an orderly society.
— Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust

So, do you know the difference between heaven and hell?
— Pink Floyd

In the summer of 1941, the Nazi regime invaded the Soviet Union, advancing rapidly and capturing millions of Soviet troops. Over three months, from October to December, three million men froze or starved to death on their way to camps. Some resorted to eating the dead. Four years later, the Soviet army advanced into Germany, creating twelve million refugees, with two million German women subjected to gang rape.

I used these historical facts in my first talk "Heading for Extinction and What to Do About It", delivered at King's College London in 2018, just before Extinction Rebellion was launched. The point was clear: facilitating mass death brings death upon oneself. This is the situation with greenhouse gas emissions. The talk reached thousands of people globally and played a role in

Extinction Rebellion becoming the largest social movement in years, with a massive global influence on climate in 2019. Yet these historical examples were quickly edited out of the talk. T.S. Eliot was right when he said, "*People can take only so much of reality*."

We may censor talks, but we cannot censor reality.

If Newton, Darwin, and Einstein were the scientific icons of their centuries, then for this one, Tim Lenton deserves that title. A climate professor at the University of Exeter, Lenton's groundbreaking 2021 paper, *The Future of the Human Niche*, clearly establishes humanity's limits. He warns that pushing temperatures beyond 2°C will make a quarter of the Earth's land surface uninhabitable, displacing a billion people. At 3°C, another billion will be forced to flee.

It might seem like I'm singling him out, but Lenton's work is part of a broader body of research. The key point is that reality is shifting, and we need to recognise it. This crisis is not just more of the same; it's a new world. A world we've never encountered before.

Later, I gave another talk to Extinction Rebellion's key figures, suggesting we were dealing with the biggest scandal in human history. Scandals usually unfold in stages: the discovery of wrongdoing, followed by denial, then a larger realisation. Investigations are conducted, but the truth is suppressed. As more evidence surfaces, it becomes undeniable. The house of cards collapses, and justice is served.

One of the most notable examples of this is the child abuse scandal in Boston, depicted in the film *Spotlight*. What started as a few bad apples turned out to be a massive, systemic issue. Lenton's research is that moment of undeniable truth. One billion people displaced. You can try to downplay it, but denying its significance would be foolish. This isn't a scandal within the system; the system itself is the scandal.

The machine - the complex system that governs us - is where the horror lies. It takes time for us to fully recognise this, especially because it feels so abstract. But deep down, we know. There's

reluctance to confront it, yet the truth is undeniable. If you're reading this, step away for a moment, take a walk, then come back. It's time to confront this head-on.

One billion displaced people. That's the primary scenario we face. It could be more, maybe less. The number is not the point. The point is the scale of catastrophe. This is the reality we're heading towards.

A billion refugees would be twenty times the number of refugees at the end of World War II - humanity's greatest suffering. We're looking at a crisis that will unfold over a decade or two, starting in the mid-2030s. As of 2024, we are at 1.5°C, increasing at 0.3°C per decade. This is rising exponentially. By the mid-2030s, we could be close to 2°C with a billion people on the move. If we apply historic rates, this translates to around 100 million killed and 50 million raped.

But the worst part is the people in power already know. While I was writing this book, *The Economist* ran an article about Sudan: "500 days of civil war have directly killed 150,000 people and forced more than 10 million to flee". A famine is threatening to be worse than anything since the 1980s. And this isn't just Sudan, it's the whole Sahel region, where every country is on the brink of crisis. Climatic stress, state collapse, and violence are taking over. And it's only 2025. And they know it.

Tom Tugendhat, a contender for UK Tory Party leadership in 2024, even said he was told by UN officials: "If you think Syria was bad, wait until you have 500 million refugees coming out of the Sahel". I spoke to him at a meeting with Conservative MPs about the climate crisis. He didn't deny it. They know. Yet they keep on as if nothing is wrong.

Before I was sent to prison, I attended a private fundraising event for a climate charity. I asked a British farmer, "How many people are going to starve to death?" He answered, "One billion". Then we all went back to our nice chats and snacks. *The Zone of Interest* is being played out in the plush spaces of our Western capitals. Starvation is slow, painful torture. It's not like being shot; it's long

and drawn out. One aid worker put it like this: "First, you see your animals die. Then, you see your children die. And then, you die". Is it not the most obscene crime to impose this on hundreds of millions of people?

What about you? Do you need a break? A walk? A moment to breathe? They aren't coming to save us.

The most traumatic moment since I got involved in all of this wasn't reading Tim Lenton's paper; it was meeting with the editor of *The Guardian*. I laid out the situation - everything I've just written - clear and precise. There was no misunderstanding. Her response? "Well, thank you, Roger", like I'd just handed over a quarterly finance report. Then she stood up and walked out. Shortly after, *The Guardian* stopped calling it 'climate change' and started calling it the 'climate crisis'. That was it. My parents had read *The Guardian* for sixty years. I grew up on it. It felt like a betrayal. A personal one. I couldn't sleep. I spiralled into depression for weeks. And this wasn't a one-off.

As co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, I met with the North London liberal elite - Greenpeace directors, heads of charities, top journalists, politicians. Nothing. I'll never forget the 'radical' Mayor of Hackney going on about tree planting, desperate to distract me. No signal could pierce the noise. And the noise only gets louder. Every year, it gets more deafening.

After my trial, I reluctantly allowed a lawyer to represent me at my sentencing. I wasn't keen, but I'm human. She was "terrified". Not by the million limp bodies against the fences. No, by my five-sentence sentence. I suggested maybe it was time for lawyers to stop cooperating. She told me she could only make representations on sentences, nothing else. She described herself as a "robot". And admitted it was all just "going through the motions".

The judge had already made up his mind. After two hours of legal argument, he retired for ten minutes to 'consider', then came back and sentenced us all to four to five years in prison. No doubt, no uncertainty. Case closed. We were led off to the cells.

The most intelligent, learned minds can also be the most irrational because they're privileged and insulated from the suffering of the many. A lawyer friend of mine put it this way: It's easier for people like me to get arrested because we don't have much to lose. Lawyers and other professionals worry about their careers. Breaking the rules could jeopardise those careers. But this is "not the end of the world", right? Except, it is. This is the blindness of the elites. Ordinary people don't have the luxury of pretending. They have to face reality. Ask them if the world's ending, and half of them will say it's coming this century. That's what the scientists are predicting.

The real lesson from the Holocaust is that the moral crisis of modernity isn't about a few evil individuals - it's about the millions of 'good' people who do their bidding. I'm sure Judge Hehir and Lord Hoffman think they're good people. They're just following the law. But in doing so, they're facilitating a cascade of horrors. Didn't the SS officers kiss their kids goodbye before going off to carry out mass killings? Our governments may make noise, but they won't break the rules. Look at the new Labour government - they're full of 'good' people, yet they cancelled a £28 billion green investment to stick to their fiscal rules. Breaking the rules? Unthinkable.

The real irony here is that these are the people who will suffer the most when it all collapses. Another sociological truth is that happiness, or the lack of it, depends on how far you have to fall. It's about perspective. The more you have to lose, the more you suffer. The film *The Pianist* illustrates this well: a middle-class family forced into the Warsaw ghetto, while their working-class socialist friend stays upbeat, producing anti-Nazi pamphlets. The mother looks around their cramped new home and says "How could it get any worse?" And then, it does. The more you have to lose, the worse the fall. Those who could have broken the rules, made a real difference, but chose not to? They won't survive the collapse. There's no hope for them. They're not coming to save us. It's too late. The bodies will pile up. And for those who are willing

to see it, or too exhausted to look away, there's only one thing left: despair. An all-encompassing despair that swallows you whole.

It would be tempting to end this here. I mean, really tempting. But to stop now would be immoral. Irrational. Cowardly even, to leave it like this - without hope. Our culture's dogma of instrumental reason demands a positive word, a plan. But I disagree. I disagree with clarity. Instrumental reason is no saviour. It's our devil. Despair isn't the end; it's the beginning.

Despair, as Lev Shaskov, a forgotten figure of the Russian Revolution, once argued, is the penultimate human emotion. In the intellectual chaos of the 1930s, as Europe staggered between the First and Second World Wars, people began to reach beyond the confines of reason, searching for something more. Shaskov believed that only when we surrender to despair does the path to salvation reveal itself. We are long past the days when political labels like left and right mattered. What we're facing now is a deeper issue that unites both sides. The machine is a system that refuses to acknowledge the devastation it's causing. It's a refusal rooted in a blind faith in reason, the misguided belief that human progress can only come through logic and material gain.

The reality is hard to face. Can we really be this far gone? Our inability to comprehend the growing complexity of society has led to catastrophe after catastrophe. Each disaster has chipped away at the modern ideal until we're left with nothing but ruin. The First World War was just the beginning. It was supposed to end quickly, but instead, it turned into a terrible slaughter. Then came the rise of Hitler who took a country of culture and enlightenment and turned it into the heart of the Holocaust. Despite this, we continued, driven by the relentless machinery of progress. We played with nuclear weapons, lived under the constant threat of annihilation, and distracted ourselves with excessive consumption. Now, the machine has brought us to the edge, and this time, we won't even need to push it. It will do the work for us.

There's a certain dark irony in all of this. The very people who

will suffer most from this system are the ones with the most to lose. Those of us with less material comfort may have a clearer view of the reality we face because we don't have the luxury of denial. For those at the top, it's all about perspective. The more you have, the harder the fall.

THE TRUTH OF REVOLUTION

Revolutions, at their core, can be seen as a volatile mix of wanting to move forward and longing to return to something lost. This tension between change and conservatism has often been at the heart of social upheaval, and today it is reaching its final breaking point. What unites the left and right is their shared obsession with progress and growth. But there's an alternative narrative, one that has always existed on the other side of despair: a return to a life rooted in art, ritual, and spirituality. This is the essence of true conservatism, a vision of life that doesn't aim to get somewhere, but simply exists.

The relentless push for material gain and power has tried to stamp out this way of life, but it has always remained at the heart of human culture. The great myths of history, the religious stories of the west and the east, tell us this same thing: human reason is not the ultimate path. It is a phase, a temptation that leads us to despair. In that despair, we are confronted with the emptiness of our existence. But out of this moment of darkness comes the possibility of rebirth.

In the west, this is known as the 'dark night of the soul', when we confront our own selfishness, our foolishness, and our sin. It is a moment of profound despair, but also one of grace. In eastern traditions, it's the moment we face the emptiness of attachment to material things. In both cases, it is through despair that we encounter the true essence of being, a reality far greater than reason can comprehend.

This is the abyss we are staring into today. The abyss of our society's collapse. But it is not the end. It is, paradoxically, the

beginning of something new.

The narrative is clear: we must face the ultimate paradox. To live, we must die - our old selves, our old ways of thinking, must be let go. We cannot sever our connection to something greater than ourselves without consequence. What matters is the deeper meta-meaning that binds us all. We all know the story: pride comes before a fall, and this is the story of our entire culture, playing out on the world stage.

What's the way out? We must be willing to let go of the self we've created, turn away from our new master - reason - and return to a higher force, to something beyond reason, what has been called the absolute, or God.

There is a world of difference between these two paradigms: reason and the absolute. Reason is all about breaking things down into parts, turning everything into an object that serves one clear function. It promises progress, but it's linear, mechanical, and devoid of mystery.

The alternative paradigm acknowledges the mystery. It says: there is no straight line; everything is full of ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction. Good and bad are intertwined. Even the best intentions can lead to the worst outcomes. Take the Minsky principle: when banks succeed too much, they create the conditions for their own collapse. It's the same with anything else: when we push beyond reasonable limits, we create chaos. The key here is restraint; knowing when enough is enough.

Reason itself is not inherently evil. In fact, it is totally necessary, but it must be restrained. Left unchecked, it wreaks havoc. It creates smooth, efficient systems that become inhuman. In history, this logic has led to show trials, gulags, ghettos, and even the Holocaust. In finance, it's driving us towards a final disaster. When we don't have the power to choose our own actions, we end up destroying ourselves.

So, what's the alternative? The new paradigm is one of virtue. It's not about achieving an end result or gaining power. It's about

seeing the value in actions for their own sake. It's not instrumental, it's intrinsic. It's in our rituals, in our play, and in our moral actions that we find a deeper, more meaningful way to live, beyond the ego and the drive for material gain.

This is the starting point: a metaphysical revolution. A rebellion against the tyranny of reason. It's an invitation to transform ourselves, to find balance and recovery.

And how does this transformation happen? History offers us some lessons. Take Nazi Germany's descent into madness in 1933. The machine of the state was hijacked and led into a nightmare. But this teaches us that we too can take control of the system. Not to return to the past, because history doesn't repeat itself, but to create a new future; a new synthesis that transcends the old battle between the old and the new.

I can't predict how this meta-logic will unfold in the years ahead, but this book is a first step. I'll outline the practical pathways forward. The first pathway is about the nature of the state; the second is about the nature of culture.

PATHWAYS: THE STATE

The state cannot survive on reason alone. We've seen countless failed attempts to answer the critical political question: who decides? Who makes the decisions that affect everyone? These decisions are rooted in the very fabric of society; they can't be avoided. Someone must make the call, but who? The two solutions we've examined here are desperate and flawed. The divine right of kings doesn't work - not because God shouldn't decide, but because the divine is beyond our comprehension. Trying to make the divine fit into reason is futile. This approach simply shifts the problem from 'who decides' to 'who decides who has the divine right to decide'.

We reach for the divine, but in doing so, we end up right back at human limitations. The divine cannot be grasped; it's beyond this world. And so, we return to the same old struggle for power, chaos, and the destruction that follows.

The second failure is when we cast aside the divine and turn to reason, hoping that human intellect will guide us to a better world. But it's the same story: nothing changes. The decision about who holds power is still stuck in the hands of humans. Who should rule? Whoever possesses the reason to enforce order. We fall into a circular trap: whoever holds sovereign power must be obeyed, and that power maintains order.

Eventually, we reach the exception - the point when sovereign power fails to maintain order. When the state no longer reflects the ideal - when it creates chaos through war, debt, or environmental destruction (such as the crisis we face now) - civil strife returns. Hobbes' idea of stopping the "brutish" life was a delusion. Reason cannot save us. In fact, it leads us back to square one: might is right. Hobbes leads to Carl Schmitt, who leads to Hitler and the death camps.

The crucial truth is that we can't solve the problem with reason alone. We need to look beyond it. The transformation comes when we realise that there's more to existence than reason - there's the divine, or God. This isn't about whether God exists in a literal sense, because that question itself is bound by reason. God, by definition, cannot be understood through reason.

So, how do we know God? By recognising that knowing isn't limited to reason. Reason has no monopoly on understanding.

The first rule of politics is simple: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is the lesson of Tolkien's ring - even the purest souls can be corrupted by wielding power too long. The solution, then, must be something beyond human reason - something that can't be corrupted. That something is chance. Chance is beyond human control. It cannot be manipulated and, therefore, represents the divine in the world - a way of knowing beyond reason. By embracing chance, we can escape the cycle of might is right.

The ancient republics from Athens to Florence understood this: only chance can prevent the corruption of politics. By incorporating

random selection - sortition - into the decision-making process, we can avoid the corruption that comes with power. When rulers are selected by lot, they can't be corrupted because they're not chosen by human means. And since their terms are limited, they can't cling to power. Leaders rotate, and new ones are chosen by chance. This is a revolutionary new design for the state.

Sortition isn't just a tweak to current democracy; it's a metaphysical shift. It's as transformative as the democratic revolution itself. It's the biggest change since humans first assumed the right to rule through violence. History since then has been a story of power struggles, and the Age of Reason has tried to contain violence within the state. But, as we've seen, the state has become a vehicle for even greater destruction.

Now, as we approach the brink of collapse, we have one last chance to change course, to recognise the true nature of reason and the divine, and to act on it by allowing chance, the hand of God, to decide who should rule. This would be the ultimate triumph of people ruling themselves, with those in power selected by chance from among them.

Of course, no system can guarantee permanent solutions to all political problems. There are practical concerns: who organizes the process of sortition, who enforces the rotation of rulers, and who oversees deliberation. These issues show that corruption can never be fully eliminated, but the key point is that the selection of decision-makers would no longer be based on human methods. Power and corruption would be removed from the process, marking a significant advance.

There will be debate on how to fine-tune this system; how to implement random selection, set term lengths, separate powers, and encourage public participation. These are long-standing issues in electoral design, but in a sortition-based system, the core idea remains: decision-makers are chosen randomly, not elected.

For now, imagine a sortition-based assembly, free from the corrupting influence of human powers. Through deep deliberation,

it could identify and implement pathways to survival. As we've seen, our collective self-destruction is driven by the interplay of the public, state, media, and economic interests. Nothing moves because everything is locked in place. Chance breaks this cycle. By selecting rulers through sortition, free from the herd's influence, we can finally make decisions based on the truth of our situation, not short-term, self-serving interests. And because rulers rotate, they can't be corrupted by power. They must step down, take off the ring, and let others rule in their place.

In this way, a jury of the people - a sortition-selected assembly - could finally consider all the evidence, reflect deeply, and make decisions to save us from the brink. They could call their own witnesses. There would be no judge to stop them. The beauty of reason is only fulfilled when it is denied by reason itself. All the greatest truths seem paradoxical. And, gloriously, it would be ordinary people who would have the power to act. They would legislate, declare the emergency, and save what can still be saved. There are no guarantees, but this is the best bet, the best design.

Returning to the courtroom: in this new system, the judge no longer holds absolute power. Their authority is replaced by a jury, still selected by lot, but who run the case themselves and may take advice on technical matters. Variations will optimise the system, and different models may coexist. But, as with politics, the legal realm is transformed by chance. Ordinary people, free from the influence of worldly power, cannot be punished for opposing it. They rotate in and out, giving them the chance to listen to common sense.

As defendants, we can present our case: "We just need five hours to explain why this is a 'right of necessity'". They'll listen. Why not? It's only five hours. It's up to the jury to decide. They should hear all the evidence, the whole truth. Finally, these ordinary people, thinking of their families, will grasp the full enormity of the situation: the reality of mass death, extinction. They will see the most obvious truth in history: that we are in a total emergency.

Sortition is the only way to break the cycle of submission to

worldly power, allowing us to see the world as it truly is. Reason can't function without the divine, without chance. The perennial wisdom was right, and it still is.

PATHWAYS: CULTURE

Divine wisdom must show itself not just in governance but in society, in culture. This isn't a small adjustment or technical fix, it's a monumental shift. It's humanity stepping into maturity - not in spite of our mistakes, but because of them. When we face our own annihilation, our collective suicide, and the reality of extinction, we break free and reconnect with the divine. This is our moment of awakening.

Nietzsche declared that God is dead, but the truth is: God must be *unkilled*. This is the moment of the exception, the emergency. It's the dawn of a new covenant, and it has nothing to do with the dry debates of secular reason. We've outgrown those discussions. The false security of reason has crumbled, and now we're all adrift. If God existed – as anarchists would argue – he would be finite and not God, and therefore it would be necessary to rebel against him. So it's not about *reason*, but about existence itself.

What's unfolding now is a cultural revolution - a breaking down of the false divide between the secular and the religious. The divine world will break through into our so-called 'real' world, driven by the sheer terror of existential crisis. When facing death, we don't seek rational answers. We cry out for God. This moment brings forth the great western Christian tradition - those moments of deep personal crisis leading to radical conversion.

In our modern world, cushioned by consumerism, many of us have managed to sleep through life's harsher truths. But life has a way of waking us up. We know the rupture of personal loss, and we're all familiar with the final rupture - our own death. Now, we're staring at the final collapse of humanity itself, our civilisation teetering on the brink. The dynamics are the same, just amplified on a global scale. This is the death of humanity as we know it.

In the face of Rome's collapse, St. Augustine responded to the existential chaos by looking beyond reliance on human will and reason, turning instead to the *City of God*. He didn't advocate retreating from the world, but recognising the divine presence in every space, in every moment. He invites us to recognise that we are not alone. Full Stop. We are invited to submit to God.

This theme has echoed throughout history. After World War I, theologian Karl Barth rejected the idea that humanity could act as if we were God. After millions died, the promises of secular liberalism rang hollow. This was not just philosophy; it was lived reality. In the face of tyranny, people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer left the German church and took up resistance against the Nazis. It wasn't a political calculation, it was because a fundamental line had been drawn between the Nazis' ideology of racial supremacy and Christianity's commitment to human equality. Bonhoeffer's courage to act came from a commitment to transcendental values, values that reason can't subvert.

This leads us to a universal truth: liberalism, and the liberal world, can't be saved from itself by liberals. It must turn to something greater. The 'dark night of the soul' opens to the experience of absolute emptiness - not a nihilism, but a doorway to the infinite. This loss isn't an end, it's the beginning of an ungraspable experience beyond things, beyond attachment.

This isn't about achieving enlightenment or proving that God exists. These are finite goals that miss the point. True understanding can only be found beyond reason, beyond materialism. To the secular mind, this may seem illogical, but it's the secular mind that's bound by attachments. The real delusion lies in the belief that life can be neatly divided between the secular and the divine. Every moment, every space, is infused with divine potential. We can try to reason it away, but every effort brings us back to mystery.

The ultimate destination of this journey? Love. God is Love. It's this truth that calls us beyond reason to recognise a deeper, unifying force. The Buddha is compassion. The words might

differ, but the message is the same: out of the emptiness, out of the darkness, comes the light of what is to mature. That we only exist in maturity, and that maturity is found in Love.

This brings us back to the practical implications of cultural transformation. What we're witnessing is not the self-centred enlightenment of narcissistic escapism often seen in new age circles. Instead, it's the opposite: the death of the self and a commitment to the other; the discovery of self through others. Or perhaps, the realisation that the self and the other are one. Like the nature of God, this realisation cannot be reasoned; it is a revelation, a decision of faith. Reason must be set aside, and that is key.

This stands in direct contrast to the guiding spirit of modernity - this machine-like, all-encompassing force driven by instrumental reason. In the extreme, we saw this play out under the Nazis: they offered a 'logical' choice to those in the ghettos. If they helped in killing some, they could save others. The result? Everyone died. On the opposite side of this, we find the spiritual wisdom of the Torah: "Thou shalt not kill." There's no reasoning here, just dogma. Because reason cannot save us; only God can. The pursuit of logic leads to madness. It's what got us to the death camps, and now it's driving us toward environmental collapse.

This isn't some relic of outdated religion. It's the most important realisation for our culture today. There are rules. There are limits. Right and wrong exist. Sociological observation backs this up. When faced with temptation to act in a way that causes harm, a trader may pull back - not for a logical reason, but because it is inherently good. We don't live for reason - we live for the Good. This is not about subjective moral beliefs, but a metaphysical understanding of what it means to be fully human. It's objective.

This cultural shift is the catalyst that will deflate reason's inflated ego and bring down the house of cards that is modernity. In the aftermath of the First World War, thinkers like Karl Barth recognised that reason had failed us - it had led to devastation. Philosophers began to break down the artificial divide between the

secular and the religious, searching for meaning in a world filled with horror. This was a rehearsal for our moment, where we are now facing the universal destruction of all time and space, not just a specific moment in history.

Thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, Albert Camus, and Emmanuel Levinas discovered the same theme: an insistence on acting for the Good, regardless of reason. Levinas, echoing the Torah, highlighted our absolute responsibility to each other, and this is the core of what makes us human. It's not a contract or a trade-off. Responsibility is the essence of who we are. "I am responsible for the other, without expecting anything in return."

This unconditional responsibility stands in direct opposition to reason. It defies the utilitarian logic that drives the collective action problem - the idea that people will act only in their own self-interest unless forced to do otherwise. But this is more than just philosophical idealism, it's hard social science. This is how cultures avoid descending into chaos and ecological destruction.

In cultures where reason is confined to technical problems and kept out of sacred matters, community ethics arise to protect the commons. In such societies, those who suggest "it's every man for himself" are considered mad, not clever. This is how the collective action problem is dissolved in cultures across the world.

Levinas' philosophy - the responsibility to the other - is the opposite of the Roman obscenity of *homo sacer*, the category of people to whom no duty is owed, those who are disposable and can be killed without consequence. In today's world, we are treating future generations as *homo sacer*; people whose lives don't matter, whose suffering is ignored. The legal systems and political regimes that prioritise reason over human life are complicit in this. The logic of reason has led us to the brink of ecological and social collapse.

Some may dismiss this as an idealistic dream, especially when millions are being displaced, forced from their homelands. But they couldn't be more wrong. In *Life and Fate*, Viktor Shklovsky depicts random acts of kindness and unconditional love amidst

the hell of the Eastern Front in World War II. These acts confirm Levinas' point: it is only in the face of total destruction that we truly confront the divine. In those moments, we realise that Love is all there is. Nothing else matters.

What we're facing now is the potential for this realisation to happen not just on an individual level, but at the level of an entire culture. The prospect of total loss brings with it the possibility of total transformation.

Here lies the fatal flaw in the neoliberal idea of the 'End of History'. First, materialist interpretations of Hegel led to the delusion that communism would create a utopia, and when that failed, it was replaced by the belief that liberal democracy would succeed. The triumph of reason was supposed to be grounded in a new social contract: "I give, and I get." But this, too, has proven false. In fact, it was reason's final gamble.

The tragedy of Hegel's master-slave dialectic can't be solved through liberal contracts or legal rights. The true resolution is found in Levinas' insight: we give recognition unconditionally, without expectation. We act in love, for the divine.

In our current crisis, this shift has massive consequences. It dissolves the forces of social destruction - between humans, and between humans and nature. The ruthless logic of reason falls away because it no longer makes sense. The cultural forces that drive us beyond the Earth's limits will vanish, not because of moral restraint, but because we no longer believe in that logic. It's metaphysical, not ethical.

The dark emptiness we face brings us to confront the meaninglessness of material things. On our deathbeds, we won't think about what we accumulated, but about our relationships with others and the divine. In the same way, when a culture confronts mass death, it wakes up from its delusion. The logic that drives us to destroy everything creates an unbearable social stress - a background unease growing until it overwhelms us. We're already seeing the first signs of rebellion against this lack of control in

movements like Brexit and the rejection of complexity from both the left and the right. People are exhausted by the endless push for progress - this abstraction that is literally making us mentally ill.

This new culture won't just be about a single development, like the introduction of sortition. It will create a range of new institutions driven by service and dedication - a new leadership ethos focused on the community, not the self. It will rise above old political and religious divides, where collective action and rituals reflect a new awareness that practicality is always embedded in mystery. Actions will be done for their own sake, as much as for a purpose. Confrontation will merge with dialogue – a real dialogue, born from confrontation. A strong "no" will be coupled with an offer to cooperate.

From this, a new sense of unity will emerge. Without it, we cannot respond effectively to the crises we face. But beyond necessity, coming together is where we truly belong.

In a culture of togetherness, we'll find the courage to face the material transformation ahead. That transformation will mean simplification, the opposite of complexity. It will shatter the myth of "there is no alternative". There will be a massive rupture, the greatest human drama of all - whether through our collective will or the collapse of Earth's systems, or a combination of both.

Those who cling to the paradigms of growth and progress must understand that the longer they hold on, the worse it will get. The deeper the crash, the greater the backlash against the world of reason - science, technology, and material production. History shows that extremity often leads to its opposite. Take, for example, the centuries before European arrival in Mexico: maize production led to rapid population growth, but when ecological limits were exceeded and the climate shifted, there was mass starvation. Afterwards, maize was never grown again - people wanted nothing to do with the developments that caused such destruction.

To survive, we will still need reason. This is the key to developments in culture, science and technology. But if, as predicted,

runaway global heating occurs, we must act now. We can't afford to reject all that's useful. Materiality - the real world - operates under natural laws. We inhabit it, and the goal is balance, not unchecked consumption. This wisdom transcends politics, uniting figures like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Edmund Burke, who recognised the need for limits and a human scale. They emphasised that there is a person, not just an individual, and a community, not merely a machine. An enchanted world exists, and these are the roots of the next civilisation, if one emerges.

For thousands of years, the logic of destruction for material gain has prevailed. From fire to agriculture, the rise of the state to the wars that followed, we've seen reason lead us to the brink. But we must be brave enough to see that this isn't just another chapter. It's the end of the story. The end of what we've done to ourselves and the world. But history shows that agency always remains. We are political beings, capable of choice. Everything I've outlined points to something even more fundamental. In the old language, we are the children of God. We must act for love, or we will perish. This is what our maturation as a species demands. Knowledge alone won't save us - in fact, it may destroy us. There's a world beyond knowledge.

I am a practical person, uninterested in grand ideals. I prefer the concrete - the science and the numbers. But it is the raw terror of what's to come that has brought me to this new awareness. I've faced the power of the state - the police dragging me from court, the days in a cell. This is the reality.

Yet, here's the paradox: out of the dark, from infinite emptiness, we discover something else. I don't have all the words - no one does - but this is real too. The moral trauma of western culture comes from the stories of adventurers seizing control of the state and wreaking havoc on the world. Amid the despair, we recognise the need and the miraculous opportunity to create a symmetrical opposite. We need new adventurers to lead us back to life, to avoid eternal death.

The new culture must be one of civil resistance, armed not with

material power, but with the power of transcendence - living in a new world untouched by worldly power. This consciousness, here and now, cannot be taken from us. It is this invisible power that has the potential to bring down empires. Our task now is to dismantle the final empire.

In his most insightful moment, Lord Hoffman suggested that those engaging in civil disobedience might deserve leniency for the "sincerity of their beliefs", which are sometimes vindicated by history. In the future, if there is one, this idea will flourish. Disobedience will become a valued aspect of society, alongside assemblies and jury-controlled courtrooms - a proud and indispensable part of resisting the forces of reason when it violates our unconditional responsibility to one another.

In other words, all is lost - we commit suicide unless we act together in resistance. Every one of us. You and I, every person who desires to be human. I received a five-year prison sentence for calling for this resistance, for saying 'this has to be done'.

"This has to be done."

The Necessity. The Exception. Love itself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I've always found it difficult to write the usual kind of acknowledgements you see in books. Partly because I'm uneasy with the idea that individuals—these supposedly separate "selves"—are solely responsible for doing good, and therefore deserve to be praised.

As a student at LSE, I once turned down a scholarship award and was summoned to explain myself to the Director in his grand office. I was nervous and barely able to articulate why, but I knew inside why I did it. It felt wrong to be rewarded for playing along with a game I no longer believed in. To be singled out for reward in a system built on competition and exclusion, when what I believe in is collective dignity.

There's also the problem of forgetting people, especially those who are often overlooked. Why not thank the people who made my food while I wrote this in prison? Or the farm workers who grew that food, who never get a mention? Their unseen hands carried me, as they carry so much of the world, without ever asking for thanks.

Finally, I have to admit that this has been an intensely personal project. While much of it is structured as a logical argument, beneath it runs a current of rage and betrayal. These emotions don't dictate how I treat people, but it would be dishonest to pretend

they aren't there, moving through me in involuntary waves. This work feels like it was carved out from somewhere deep inside me—ground out in solitude, day after day, in a prison cell.

So I just want to say this. First, a heartfelt thanks to my dear friends Robin and Frieda. Without Robin sorting the practicalities of "promoting me", I'd still be shouting into the Facebook void. And Frieda has been a total star, supporting me with the realities of prison life.

There are dozens more I should thank, but trying to list them would send me into a spin. So: thank you, all of you.

And then there is the great, unending flow of humanity through time and space—that which sustains me, and all of us, every day. Something far beyond the individual, holding it all together, still trying to keep the show on the road.

I'm infinitely grateful to *that-which-it-is*.

Roger Hallam, April 2025

GET INVOLVED

- **Sign up for Revolution in the 21st Century** at Rev21.earth to join Roger and Robin in trainings, workshops, and global conventions to help build a new, balanced society.
- **Join Extinction Rebellion.** From marches to nonviolent civil disobedience, there's a role for everyone—no matter your age, background, or experience. Find your local group or start your own at rebellion.global.
- **Donate to Rebels in Prison Support.** This book was produced in a prison cell. Funds from its sales go toward supporting nonviolent activists currently behind bars. Help fund actions, legal aid, and outreach at rebelsinprison.uk/donate.
- **Spread the Word.** Share this book with a reformist friend—get them out of the suicidal trap of societal collapse and into the resistance.

This is a moment in history. Be part of it.

RECOMMENDED READING

NONVIOLENT UPRISING & STRATEGY

This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century by Mark Engler & Paul Engler

Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Non-violent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World by Srdja Popovic with Matthew Miller

From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Guide to Nonviolent Resistance by Gene Sharp

Counterpower: Making Change Happen by Tim Gee

Rules for Revolutionaries: How Big Organizing Can Change Everything by Becky Bond & Zack Exley

A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict by Peter Ackerman & Jack DuVall

How Does Civil Resistance Work? by Erica Chenoweth & Maria Stephan

POWER, HEGEMONY & MESSAGING

Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate by George Lakoff

Hegemony How-to: A Roadmap for Radicals by Jonathan Smucker

If We Burn: The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution by Vincent Bevins

The Entangled Activist: Learning to Recognise the Master's Tools by Anthea Lawson

SYSTEM CHANGE:
DEMOCRACY, COMMONS & GOVERNANCE

The End of Politicians: Time for a Real Democracy by Brett Hennig

Free, Fair, and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons by David Bollier & Silke Helfrich

Flatpack Democracy 2.0: Power Tools for Reclaiming Local Politics by Peter Macfadyen

INNER WORK & RESILIENCE:
PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE HEALING

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in with Unexpected Resilience and Creative Power by Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others – Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul by Stephen Jenkinson

VISION & CULTURE: IMAGINING A BALANCED FUTURE

The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity by David Graeber & David Wengrow

The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy by Murray Bookchin

The Dispossessed by Ursula K. Le Guin

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer

The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment by Eckhart Tolle

ROGER'S RECOMMENDED READS IN PRISON

You get a lot of time to read in prison. These ten books hit me hardest — they shook my worldview, deepened my understanding, and lit the path forward.

The Matter with Things by Iain McGilchrist

Theology and Social Theory by John Milbank

Modernity and the Holocaust by Zygmunt Bauman

Soldiers of God in a Secular War by Sarah Shortall

Lev Shestov: Philosopher of the Sleepless Night by Matthew Beaumont

States and Social Revolutions by Theda Skocpol

The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran by Charles Kurzman

Hospicing Modernity by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira

The Culture Code by Daniel Coyle

YOUR TURN

All the elements of a new civilisation are already here. The future is ready to be born — but it's suffocating under the weight of the dying old. Don't we all feel it?

So now, it's your turn. Your turn to write the stories of Revolution in the 21st century. Because, for all its heartbreak, this is an incredible time to be alive.

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Note: The following list is incomplete due to Roger's imprisonment. This is best result of volunteer efforts and will be completeed in future editions.

PREFACE

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FOREWORD

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CHAPTER 1: SUICIDAL PRISONS OF OUR OWN MAKING

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APPENDIX: THE COST OF TELLING THE TRUTH

This book is dedicated to those who have paid the price for telling the truth. Across Britain, ordinary people have been imprisoned for nonviolent acts of conscience — blocking roads, speaking out against genocide, or exposing state lies.

Their sentences are not mistakes of the system; they are the system — a structure built to defend power, wealth, and destruction from public accountability.

From an abolitionist standpoint, every prisoner is a political prisoner. But those jailed for resistance reveal the state's violence in its purest form. At the time of writing, 79 people have been imprisoned in Britain for acts of nonviolent resistance through **Just Stop Oil** and **Palestine Action**, having collectively served more than **7,700 days — over 21 years — behind bars**.

To see the full and updated list of people imprisoned for acts of resistance — including photographs, stories, and campaign links — visit **rebelsinprison.uk/rebels/all**